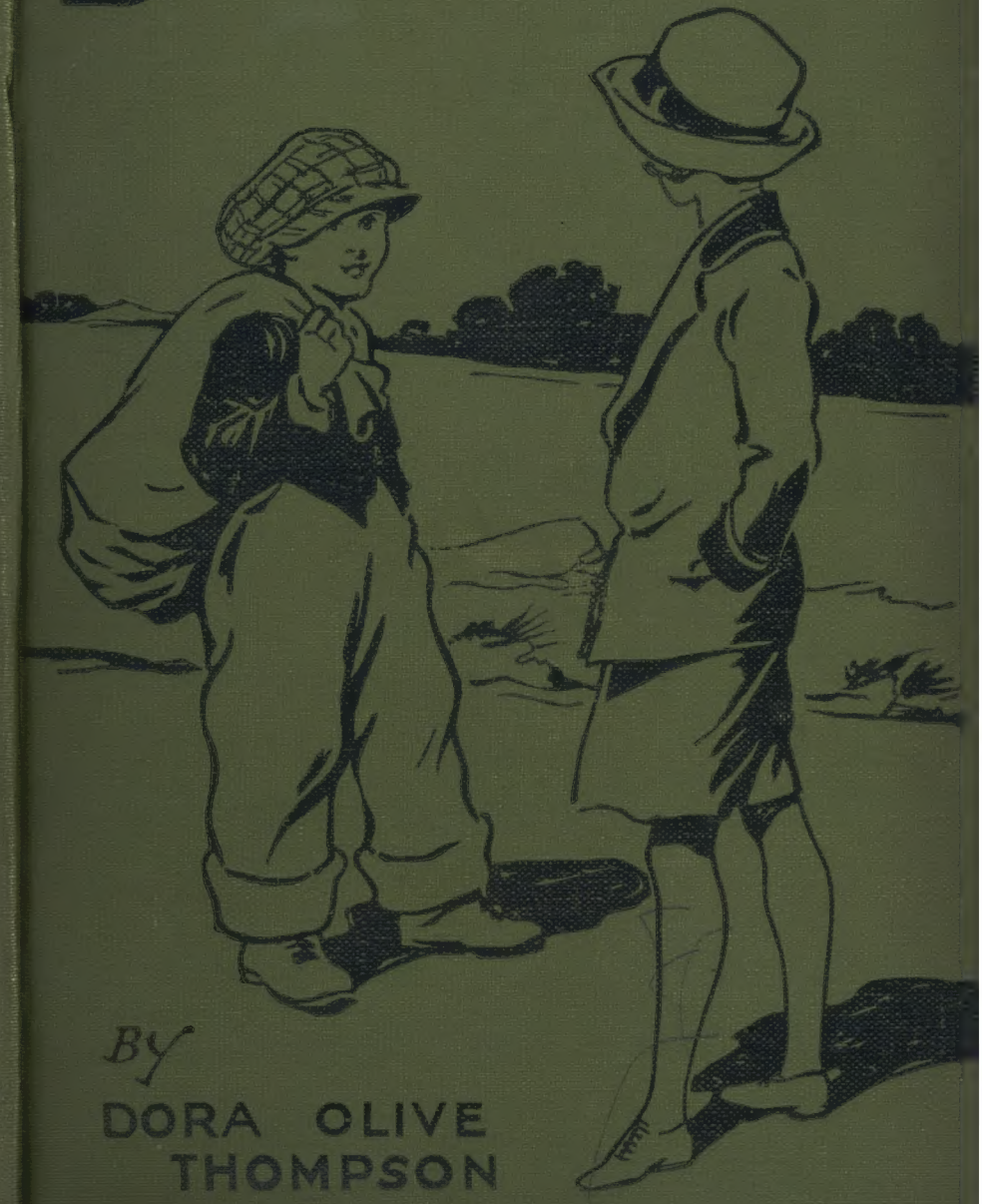
DIMPLES

DORA OLIVE THOMPSON



R. T. S.

DIMPLES



By DORA OLIVE THOMPSON

Love Aunt Mary

Gail Stone

RFD Westmoreland

Maine

DIMPLES



AND SO IT CAME ABOUT THAT DIMPLES RODE OUT INTO THE PRAIRIE LAND

[*See page 40*

DIMPLES

by

Dora Olive Thompson

Author of "Joy Meredith"
"A Dealer in Sunshine"
"Lizzie Anne," etc.

*

Illustrated
by
GORDON BROWNE, R.I.



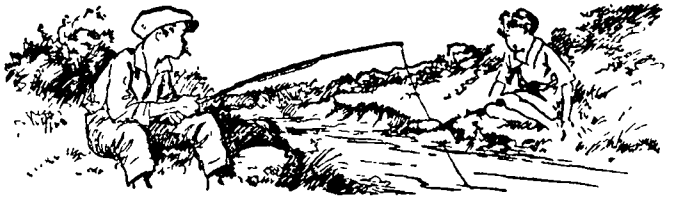
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DIMPLES

CHAPTER ONE

LITTLE DOROTHY-JEAN

DIMPLES! It was not her real name, of course. She had been duly and properly christened Dorothy-Jean without any mention of the Dimples at all. But she had been such a dimply, roly-poly sort of baby that the name had attached itself quite naturally—Dimples Adair. And the Dorothy-Jean fell almost forgotten in the mists of disuse.

Cedar Hedges, the home where Dimples Adair spent her little girlhood, was very beautiful —a low, wide, grey-stone house among the Caledon hills, with its windows looking out over the apple-orchards to the blue of the little rolling hills in the distance. It was to Cedar Hedges that Gordon Adair had brought his bride; but they had not enjoyed it for long. Now that Dimples was eight years old she could hardly even remember her parents, only her mother as a vague, uncertain memory, very beautiful, and mixed up with the clearer recollection of the picture

of the fairy queen—the fairy queen with wings hitched on behind.

But one memory stood out vividly clear—the night when Mrs. Trustom, her nurse, had told her that her father and mother had been killed on their way home in the motor. Mrs. Trustom's face as she had told her had been so funny, screwed-up and twisted, and her voice high-pitched and cracked.

Dimples had been such a little thing at the time, not much more than a baby, that she had hardly realized her great loss. She had asked, of course, day after day, " Where's mudder ? " and repeated, " I want daddy ! " until she seemed to recognize that " mudder " and daddy were simply not there. But she had not known that everyone had shaken their heads, asking, " What will become of the child ? "

Then it was that Gordon Adair's elder brother, Augustus, had appeared on the scene. A writer, mystic, wanderer, he had welcomed for a little while at any rate the chance of retirement, of seclusion in the quiet of Cedar Hedges among the Caledon hills.

And so he had become self-appointed guardian of little Dimples Adair. Not, as he assured himself, that he had any intention of burdening himself with the training of the child. That could be left to a nurse—there was plenty of money for such a necessity. Augustus Adair had never understood children, had always looked upon them with a certain degree of suspicion ; queer, incomprehensible little beings they seemed to him—boys with toads and such-like aversions

in their pockets, girls leaving dolls around to be stepped on and smashed.

And so Dimples was placed in the care of Mrs. Trustom—zealously reliable and vigilant.

" Take good care of the child," Augustus Adair directed. " Let me know if anything is wanted." And he felt that he had nobly done his duty towards his brother's little daughter.

It was a lonely life for the little girl, guarded and protected from all outside intrusion—from fun-loving and youthful companionship as well. Sometimes, of course, she went for a ride on Fleetfoot, her own pet pony, accompanied by Hicks, the gardener, and once a week, on Sunday afternoon, she was taken to Sunday school by Mrs. Trustom. It was Mrs. Perry Dawson, wife of the young minister, who took that class of little girls, and, with a sense of sympathy in her heart for the lonely little girl in the beautiful home, she brought to Cedar Hedges picture books and fairy stories, and so opened the gate of the land of Make-believe to little Dimples Adair.

Stimulated by these pictures and stories, and thrown so largely on her own resources, Dimples peopled that world about her with creations of her own imagination—fairies, who danced in the moonlight; brownies, who lived in the apple trees; pixies, who frolicked on the sunbeams; and gnomes, who came with the dark and lurked in shadowy corners to strike terror into the hearts of frightened little girls.

In the background of life was her uncle—remote, unreal. Not to be disturbed or interrupted. In the foreground was Mrs. Trustom,

ever-present, watchful, always saying, " Don't do that, oh no, no ! "

But some things were very beautiful. Early in life Dimples discovered that. Winter mornings, when the sun sparkled on the hills. Spring, when the trees of winter broke into a blur of green, and robins chirruped on the fence. Summer evenings, when the sun which had been so hot all day sank in a red, red sky. And people were beautiful too—some of them. Not Mrs. Trustom, her face flat and wide with bristly hairs under her chin. Not Hannah, the housemaid, her chin poking forward from a long, thin neck. Or Emma, the cook, red of face, short of breath, always hot and perspiring.

But Mrs. Perry Dawson was beautiful—Dimples was quite, quite sure of that. All the other little girls in the class thought she was beautiful too, with her " lovely blue eyes and lovely pink cheeks and lovely white teeth ! " No wonder her husband called her " dear " right out loud. And Mrs. Perry Dawson liked to talk to those little girls, they all knew that, and, better still, she liked them to talk to her.

Dimples Adair was the subject of much interest among the members of that class. Dimples was very rich—their mothers had told them that ; she lived in a beautiful house with lots of servants and a nurse to take care of her—a nurse who even brought her to Sunday school. Oh, that alone was quite sufficient to set her apart as " different " from them all.

Of this attitude Dimples was unaware. After all, how could she know that she was looked upon

as " different " ? That a number of servants in a house was unusual ? That after one was a wee, wee baby one seldom had a nurse ? That her life in Cedar Hedges *was* different from that of other little girls was forced upon her with almost terrifying suddenness.

It all began with Mrs. Perry Dawson's tea-party.

Mrs. Dawson was inviting the little girls of her class to tea at her house one Saturday afternoon, and asked Mrs. Trustom if Dimples could come too.

Of course Mrs. Trustom shook her head and said " No." Very politely, but decidedly.

Why, Dimples demanded of her suddenly rebellious little self, why couldn't she just have nodded and said " Yes " instead ? But Mrs. Trustom was not, and never would be, a " yes-sing " kind of person.

But something, entirely unsuspected by the watchful Mrs. Trustom, had happened within her young charge. For the first time in her life Dimples was rebellious, and that rebellion flamed into open and indignant action.

On the afternoon of the party she slipped off when Mrs. Trustom thought she was playing with her doll in the garden, wriggled under the back fence, followed that path through the woods to the highway, and arrived at the party dusty, breathless but triumphant.

Perhaps Mrs. Perry Dawson suspected the truth. Certain it was that she telephoned immediately to Cedar Hedges to reassure a frantic Mrs. Trustom.

As we said before, it all began with Mrs. Perry Dawson's tea-party, for that little escapade had wide and far-reaching effects.

Running away, Dimples decided, when the party was over and she had been taken home in the car by the minister himself, running away was heaps of fun; far more fun than staying around with Mrs. Trustom all the time. And so the next afternoon, when Mrs. Trustom was having her after-luncheon nap, Dimples ran away again, down to the creek this time, where for the next hour she paddled barefoot, loving the feel of the water on her feet and the "squelch" of the soft wet sand between her little pink toes.

It was really great fun because, when the vigilant Mrs. Trustom woke up, Dimples had wriggled back under the fence and was playing with her doll in the garden.

That was the beginning, and during the days that followed Dimples often squirmed under the fence and ran off towards the creek—and freedom.

And then one afternoon—a June afternoon it was when the woods were cool and green with little dapply specks of sunlight—Dimples found a boy sitting beside her creek—a small boy he was, sitting there quite motionless, fishing.

Dimples was indignant. Raising her voice she called across the intervening space, "Hi, go 'way!"

Not one whit abashed the boy eyed her with surprise. "Go 'way yourself!" he responded with equal clearness.

Well, of course, neither of them went away. Dimples, in fact, came to the edge of the creek

and stared at him curiously. " Catching fish ? " she asked.

" What else'd I be catchin' ? "

" Well, have you really *caught* any ? "

Reluctantly the boy shook his head. " But I'm goin' to. There're whoppers down there, lots ! "

It was this very boy who forced upon Dimples Adair the consciousness that she was " different " from other little girls. Not on this very first afternoon, it is true; he was rather bashful then, eyeing her furtively from under the protection of his cap, which he had pulled low over his left eye.

But the next afternoon he had lost that shyness, and had recovered what was evidently a naturally aggressive manner. " You're Dimples Adair, aren't you ? " he demanded. " You're the kid what lives in that place called Cedar Hedges ? "

Dimples nodded, secretly rather proud of the distinction.

" Jiminy ! I wouldn't be you for anything ! They don't let you play with other kids, do they ? They don't let you have no fun a'tall ! We call you the candy-kid. If anyone called *me* that I'd knock his block off ! Candy-kid ! " he snorted scornfully. " Candy-kid, havin' a nurse to toot you round—a nurse to take you to Sunday school ! I'd like to see a nurse luggin' me—I'd soak her one in the eye ! "

Dimples stood up, her cheeks blazing. This nice little boy was proving anything but nice, was being, in fact, just plain horrid. She wanted to tell him that she did have fun, lots of it. That she hadn't a nurse " tooting " her round. That she *could* play with other kids, but something

inside the honest little heart of Dimples Adair forbade those words. For, after all, the boy had spoken the truth; she was quick to realize that. She just couldn't say that she hadn't a nurse—when she had. That she could play with other kids—when she couldn't. Oh no. But Dimples could, and did, respond by that age-old retort, undignified perhaps, but gloriously satisfying.

She stood there facing him, her cheeks very pink, her eyes very bright, and sticking out her tongue as far as it would go, made a face at the irritating small boy.

He made another—a worse one than hers—and then for some obscure reason they felt better. He even let her hold his line for a while and Dimples caught a fish. It was only a sun-fish, not worth catching, according to the boy who threw it back into the water and took the line himself—when, to Dimples' inward delight, he caught nothing at all.

But as she went back to Cedar Hedges his words rang in her ears, "Candy-kid—they don't let you have no fun—having a nurse——"

And with the memory a little decision took root and sprang up in the heart of Dimples Adair.

At the dinner table that night she told her uncle. Broke with startling abruptness on the usual quiet which enveloped the meal by announcing her declaration of independence.

"Uncle Gus, I want to go to school!" Her voice was shrill and clear, "and if anyone calls me candy-kid I'll knock their block off!" She had not the vaguest idea of what "block" meant, but it had a sturdy and satisfactory sound. "I'm

going to play with other kids. I'm going to have some fun. I'm not going to have a nurse tooting me round——" Oh, Dimples remembered those words vividly, " and if she does I'll soak her one in the eye ! "

Had a bomb exploded outside the window it could not have commanded a more stunned silence. Mrs. Trustom sat transfixed, momentarily paralysed with horror. " I won't have a nurse tooting me round—I'll soak her one in the eye——" Had she really *heard* those words ?

Augustus Adair stared across the table at the curly-headed little girl whose grey eyes at the moment were so bright and whose cheeks were so pink. He felt suddenly helpless and incompetent, but in the tenseness of the situation did a very wise thing. He pushed back his chair and stood up.

" Supposing," he suggested, " that we go into my study and talk about it."

She did most of the talking, little Dimples Adair, sitting far back on the chesterfield. Away from the restraining influence of Mrs. Trustom, she told him all about it—about running away, about the creek and the boy. " He said," there was just a suspicion of indignant tears in her voice, " he said they called me candy-kid. That if anyone called him that he'd knock their block off——" Her voice trembled and trailed off into silence.

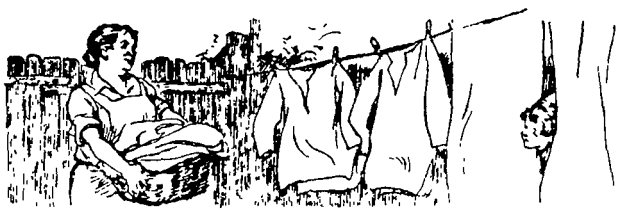
For the first time in his life Augustus Adair looked into a minor tragedy of childhood through another pair of eyes—young, grey, star-like eyes. And then he became comforting, reassuring.

" All right," he said, to Dimples' infinite relief, " we'll see about you going to school. After all, you should have companionship of girls of your own age. And we'll let Mrs. Trustom fade into the background—a little."

Dimples slipped down off the chesterfield, crossed over to his chair and put her arm around his neck. " Uncle Gus," she whispered, " you *are* a dear—much, much nicer than I thought you were. When shall I start school—to-morrow ? "

He sat there in the June-scented dusk after she had gone to bed. There was a little twinkle in his eyes, a rare, unusual twinkle. Dimples, little Dimples, was developing ideas of her own. " I will ! " she had said, and " I won't ! " And the tone of her voice had been convincing in its finality.

Crossing to his desk he clicked on the lamp, the shadows of the room blending with the sudden rosy glow. He sat down and pulled his papers toward him. But that rare little twinkle in the depths of his eyes still persisted. Perhaps it lingered there over the memory of those foreign-sounding phrases which had rolled so glibly off her tongue. Perhaps at the recollection of Mrs. Trustom, petrified with horror. But perhaps that little twinkle lingered because it liked best of all the memory of those words, " Uncle Gus, you *are* a dear ! "



CHAPTER TWO

CHILDHOOD DAYS

AND so Dimples Adair was sent to school in town, and was duly entered on the school record as Dorothy-Jean Adair. The chauffeur drove her in each morning, and the other little girls, watching her arrive, would nudge each other and exclaim, " There's the kid from Cedar Hedges. Just imagine being driven to school ! "

But they liked Dimples Adair—had accepted the name after hearing the chauffeur call her Miss Dimples—and Dimples liked her new friends, liked the afternoons when she was allowed to stay and play in their own homes.

" I love school," she told that never-failing confidant, Mrs. Perry Dawson, " and I love having my lunch in the school-yard—it's like a picnic. I rather like the lessons too—some of them. The teacher says I'm fine at composition, but I'm no good of an arithmeticker."

Under the stimulus of that praise Dimples' next composition was handed in under the heading " Our Showfur."

> " We have a luvley showfur. He looks nice when he is dresed up. He is nice to. Once a little gurl ran in frunt of our moter and our showfur stoped so quik that we didnt run over her at al. Wen I get big I shal mary a showfur."

There was no doubt about it but the homes of those other little girls were very different from Cedar Hedges. Dimples was quick to recognize that, but they were nice too—in their way.

There was Irene Blackie's, for instance. Irene lived in a very small house in the middle of a row of other small houses. It had the funniest backyard—or, at least, it seemed funny to Dimples Adair. A backyard separated by a board fence from another backyard next door. Often there were clothes hanging on the line; they would flap against her cheek as she ducked under. Sometimes Mrs. Blackie herself would come out to take in those clothes, and, dropping them into a snowy pile in the basket, would smile at the little girls. " Rene," she would say, as if it was just a sudden thought, " there are a few ginger cookies in the jar——" And Irene would scamper into the house and bring them out—crisp, gingery, and delicious. Oh, the *fun* you had in that backyard—playing store with mud-pies for sale, planning and planting a garden with tiny packages of seed, and digging it up to plant all over again in another spot.

The Picketts' backyard was fun too. There were innumerable little Picketts, it seemed, for

though there were several at school whenever you went to the house there were always more, swarming over the front steps, banging in and out of the backyard. There was nothing green and growing in that backyard, for, with the Picketts around, nothing had a chance to grow. A broken, unpainted fence encircled that hard-baked plot of ground, but it encircled something else too—the lusty, vigorous, joy-loving Picketts, and laughter, and merriment, and fun.

Perhaps they thought Dimples' home was funny, those four little girls who were invited to Cedar Hedges sometimes on a Saturday afternoon. Mrs. Trustom drew the line at boys. "I won't have them, that's all," she declared. "Mischievous, impudent, little scamps."

Dimples looked up at her coaxingly. "I wish you'd let them come. I just love little boys!"

Which, as the scandalized Mrs. Trustom rather triumphantly remarked to Augustus Adair, was just the kind of thing you might expect a child to say after mixing with all sorts of children in school.

But she remained quite firm on that point—no boys. And so the little girls came up occasionally on a Saturday to romp and scamper over the smooth lawns; to play hide-and-seek in among the great oak trees; to gaze wide-eyed at Hannah, the housemaid, as she served their tea on the lawn; and to stroke the smooth, satin-like skin of Fleetfoot, the pony.

And after a little while school and school friends seemed so natural that Dimples felt as if

she had been among them all her life, almost forgot those lonely days before school began.

There were certain events which marked those years, days or weeks in which they happened standing out from the rest like sunlit hill-tops. There was the summer holiday by the sea, very wonderful it seemed to the little girl from Ontario —the overnight train journey, her first sight of the ocean. There were visits to the city. The first when Dimples was a very little girl, the time she had been taken to see "Peter Pan," which had impressed her so deeply, that after her return to Cedar Hedges she had tried to fly off the fence. The result had been disappointing: no glorious Peter Pan flight, but a sprained ankle and badly skinned nose. On her second visit the crowded city streets held her interest—the intentness, the busyness of those crowds; the store windows—for it was December and they flashed through the early dusk, aflame with colour; the honk of motor horns, the screech of brakes, the clanging of street cars.

"They make it just ever so exciting, don't they?" she asked Mrs. Trustom. "Oh, I love it all, don't you?"

"I do not," that good lady replied, longing for the quietness of Cedar Hedges.

Another great event had happened when Dimples was eleven. It was the minister's new baby. Wee David Dawson, Dimples thought, was just the dearest, sweetest baby you could ever hope to see. And sometimes during the following summer she was allowed to push his carriage. In fact all the little girls claimed that privilege, and

took turns in pushing him to the corner and back. " Never out of sight," little David's mother said. " I know you girls are careful, but he's very, very precious."

One summer afternoon they brought him to Cedar Hedges, and while they had tea on the lawn he lay on his blanket kicking his pink legs and crowing, " Goo-oo-oo ! " It was then that the minister asked his wife, quite seriously, " There, didn't that sound like ' daddy ' ? Isn't he very young to be talking, Molly ? "

Which Dimples thought was rather funny, because " Goo-oo-oo " hadn't really sounded like " daddy " at all.

Butterball was another great event, of course. Dimples always remembered the day he arrived. It was a hot July morning and the windows of the living-room were open. There had been a sudden flutter at the window, a flash of yellow wings and he had hopped in—a little, inquisitive, yellow canary. He had seemed not a whit frightened when Dimples said " Oh ! " but had cocked his little head inquiringly and said " Tweet ! "

On a sudden impulse Dimples had slipped out of the room, down the stairs into the cellar, and from the store-cupboard brought to light a cage which she carried back into the living-room.

Not for one minute did the little stranger hesitate when he saw that cage. Here was something he knew, something he loved. Straight up and through the door he flew.

Mrs. Trustom disapproved of him, of course. " We don't know where he comes from, or who he

belonged to," she objected, " and he may be the carrier of all sorts of germs."

" Germs ! " Dimples gasped, " germs—that dear little yellow darling ! "

In part Uncle Augustus agreed with Mrs. Trustom. " We must inquire and see if anyone has lost him," he said. " There must be an empty bird-cage somewhere, Dimples."

" All right," Dimples was obviously reluctant ; " but let's ask people we know haven't lost a bird."

But their inquiries brought no response ; no one, apparently, had lost a yellow canary, and so Butterball—the name just attached itself naturally somehow, for that was exactly what he was like, a ball of golden butter—made himself quite at home. He pecked at Dimples' finger when she changed his seed and water ; he sang, rather timidly at first, but swelling into a merry, joyous little warble.

" Oh I do love you," Dimples would say, " you dear little ball of yellow feathers."

But there was, during those years, a growing breach, a lack of sympathy between Mrs. Trustom and her young charge.

" If I don't want to do a thing, she says ' You must,' " Dimples complained to Mrs. Perry Dawson ; " if I do, she says ' Don't.' "

Mrs. Dawson smiled. " You ought to be well trained, Dimples dear."

Dimples wrinkled her expressive little nose. " Then I hate being well trained," she said.

There was the matter of music, for instance. The piano stood in the big, dim, unused drawing-

room at Cedar Hedges. Her mother, so Augustus Adair told Dimples, had been very musical, and it had been her piano.

" Then," Dimples decided, rumpling her curls in a frenzy of excitement, " I'm going to be very musical too."

But according to Mrs. Trustom it was all nonsense, a ridiculous waste of time, strumming away at the piano when she didn't know how to play.

" But I do know how," Dimples retorted. " I've learned lots in school, and Mrs. Dawson taught me more. Just because you don't know anything about music you don't want anyone else to know anything either."

At which remark—striking perhaps nearer to the truth than Dimples realized—Mrs. Trustom stalked from the room, erect, dignified, obviously offended, which had the intended effect of making Dimples feel mean, miserable and sorry.

But the greatest event of all happened when Dimples was fourteen. She had lengthened then into a thin, long-legged girl with the kiss of the sun freckling her nose, a twinkle of laughter in the depths of her grey eyes, and the dimples in her cheeks flashing into view when she smiled.

In answer to her uncle's summons she scampered down to his study that sunny June morning, her thoughts running gaily on forthcoming picnics and hikes, and plans for summer fun. Quite unconscious of what was in store for her she faced him across his study, noticing almost at once that he seemed nervous, and that his words came rather quickly, very different

from his usual slow, rather drawling manner of speaking.

" Dimples," he started, and cleared his throat, " I have something to tell you."

" Something nice, Uncle Gus ? "

" You may not think so just at first, but perhaps you will later on."

She sat down on a footstool, clasped her hands about her knees, and stared up at him expectantly.

" We have decided," he said slowly, " to send you away——"

" For the summer ? To the ocean ? Oh, goody ! "

He shook his head. " No, not to the ocean, and not just for the summer, for rather longer than that. In fact, we don't know yet just how long. You will be going in about a month."

" But where, Uncle Gus, where ? "

He looked down at her as she sat there on the footstool. It was proving rather more difficult than he expected. " It is all because I've got the *wanderlust*, Dimples——"

" The *wanderlust ?* " she repeated, alarmed at the mention of what was evidently a serious disease. " Are—are you sending me away so I won't catch it too ? "

He smiled a little at that, and shifted uneasily in the big chair. " *Wanderlust* means the desire to wander, to the ends of the world and back."

She leaned forward. " And am I going too—to the ends of the world and back ? I read a fairy-story once about some one going to the foot of the rainbow. Am I going as far away as that, Uncle Gus ? "

" No, no, child. You're not going with me, or to the foot of the rainbow, either. I thought at first of leaving you here with Mrs. Trustom——"

" No, you don't ! " Dimples said, most decidedly.

" But she has to leave us anyway, because her son wants her to live with him, so we're sending you out west——"

" Out west ? "

" Do you remember a housekeeper who was here once ? Flossie you called her."

Dimples shook her head, feeling a little breathless and frightened.

" She's a widow now, living in a little Manitoba prairie town, and writes that she would be glad to have you with her while I'm away. Your board will be paid, of course, and you'll have a monthly spending allowance of your own."

" And I have to leave Cedar Hedges ? Leave Cedar Hedges ? "

" Of course," he said, impatiently ; " there is nothing so alarming about that. You will be comfortable and happy, I am sure, with Mrs. Smithers. And the prairie air is wonderfully healthy."

She was not listening at all, was repeating half under her breath, " Leave Cedar Hedges ! "

He was impatient and annoyed. That was the trouble with young folks, girls especially ; they always acted in some queer, unaccountable manner, never as one expected. " Leave Cedar Hedges ! " she was repeating over and over, as if there was horror in the thought. He glanced over at his desk. There was work there, awaiting his

efforts. Why in the world couldn't this girl just say " All right, Uncle Gus," and without more ado take herself off, leaving him to work in peace ?

But she was standing up now, was facing him with her hands clenched tightly, and a defiant light in her grey eyes. " I won't be sent away," she was saying, unexpectedly; " I won't leave Cedar Hedges ! "

He resigned himself to it then, a patient explanation that it was a necessary arrangement. That he would be away, travelling ; Mrs. Trustom would be off to her son's ; the other servants would be sent off too, and Cedar Hedges itself closed up, or let for a number of years. " Flossie Smithers is a fine woman," he said. " Mayfield itself is a nice little town with a school that you can attend in the fall. All told, it will, I think, be a splendid thing for you. You'll be going toward the end of July."

At that moment Dimples realized that it was all quite definitely settled. She would be sent away, no matter how loudly she said " I won't ! " She would be sent away from Cedar Hedges, from school and school friends ; from Mrs. Dawson and little David ; from everything that was familiar and dear, to a prairie town named Mayfield.

It was over Butterball's cage that the tears fell. Not for worlds would she have let her uncle or Mrs. Trustom see *them*.

" Butterball," she sobbed, her arms around the cage, " I won't go without you, I won't, I won't, I won't ! "

"Tweet! Tweet!" Butterball responded, which quite possibly meant "I should think not!" And then suddenly burst into song—a little, merry, reassuring song of joy.



CHAPTER THREE

"TO THE SUNSET LAND"

"The world of prairie, the world of plain,
The world of promise, and hope, and gain."
PAULINE JOHNSON.

THE days seemed to Dimples to fly past, to slip one into the other with almost incredible swiftness. "I wish," she told herself in a fierce little whisper, "I wish that July and the time to go would never come."

Already Cedar Hedges had a dismantled, half-deserted appearance. It was to be closed up and let later on, partly furnished, if suitable tenants could be found. The oriental rugs had been rolled up and sent to storage; most of the paintings, the best silver, and china had been sent off too. Fleetfoot, after a tearful farewell on the part of Dimples, was taken away. He had been bought by a lover of thoroughbred ponies, she was told. Emma, the cook, had left—surprising as it seemed to Dimples—to be married. "Why would any one," she wondered, "want to marry a person who puffs and wheezes like she does?"

Mrs. Trustom, in the midst of all the packing

and confusion, was quiet and subdued. Dimples, not noticing it particularly at the time, remembered afterwards how very quiet she had been. " She didn't seem happy or excited about going to her son," she thought. " I don't suppose she could have been feeling sorry at leaving *me*."

Only Augustus Adair seemed really light-hearted and happy over the impending change. You could tell that by the way he walked around the house singing—

" ' And come I may, but go I must, and if men ask you why,
You may put the blame on the stars and the sun, and the white road and the sky.' "

Dimples' friends regarded her with very evident envy.

" You're lucky," they told her, while her grey eyes widened with astonishment.

" Wouldn't I love to be going, too," Irene Blackie added. " We've learned something about the west in geography lessons, of course, but that isn't the same as going to see it yourself. Some folks, like you, get everything."

" I don't think I've got everything," Dimples answered slowly, and rather thoughtfully. " I haven't a mother or a dad like you have. And just now I haven't a home either."

" But you have lots of money," Irene pointed out, " you've had the darlingest pony of your own, and you drive around in a motor. You have two in your garage and we haven't even got one. I just guess you've never washed dishes in your life and I've washed hundreds—thousands ! "

But Dimples shook her curly head. " I'd be

willing to wash *millions* of dishes if I could have a mother and dad ! " she said.

The Picketts were really very much excited about Dimples going away. " Will you send us picture post-cards ? " Minnie asked her, " picture post-cards of buffaloes and Indians ? "

" It's awful excitin', out west," one of the little boy Picketts told her ; " you'd better duck down under the bedclothes at night in case wolfs'n bears'n things are round. There're cowboys out there bein' chased by perlicemen on horseback. That's what I'm goin' to be when I grow up—you just wait and see—a cowboy, or a perliceman chasin' him ! "

Butterball, so Dimples had decided, was to go with her on the train. There was opposition and objection to this idea, of course.

" It would be far simpler and better to get another bird out there if you're so anxious to have one," Augustus Adair told her ; " far better than attempting to take this one all the way on the train."

Dimples, her arms around the cage, faced him defiantly. " Butterball is going with me," she said. " If he doesn't go, I don't go either ! "

It was Mrs. Perry Dawson who, perhaps more than anyone else, seemed to realize how much the forthcoming change meant to Dimples Adair. She spoke about it one afternoon as she planted some late seeds in her own trim little garden.

" You'll feel lonely, and perhaps unhappy at first," she said to the young girl, whose grey eyes were so serious. " It is almost impossible not to feel lonely in strange places. But whether you're

happy or not will depend a lot on yourself. If you sow good seed when you first get there, Dimples " —perhaps Mrs. Dawson's occupation at the moment suggested the idea—" if you sow good seed you'll get good results."

Dimples stared at her. Mrs. Dawson was always saying something rather surprising.

" If I sow good seed ? " she repeated, puzzled. " How *do* you mean ? "

Mrs. Dawson, patting the earth down gently over the seeds she had sown, answered her slowly.

" I don't mean seeds like these," she said, " but the other kind—seeds of kindness, of helpfulness. There is a stimulating little phrase that comes from one of those fine old thinkers in the Bible—' In the morning sow thy seed.' I love that ! In the morning means when you are young, young like you are. Oh, there are so many ways of sowing seed when you are young—reading good books and learning to love beauty—beauty in literature, in art, in the lives of good men and women. ' In the morning sow thy seed.' Do you remember that another of those great thinkers had the same idea. ' For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.' "

It was a very thoughtful Dimples who walked back to Cedar Hedges a little later. " ' In the morning sow thy seed,' " she repeated the phrase. " Then I'll try," she determined with characteristic fervour. " I'll try to sow good seed. Oh, I'm ever so glad I'm young, and can get an early start ! "

The days, lengthening into summer, slipped

along, much more quickly than usual, it seemed to Dimples. It was only a month now until the time to go—she realized that from the calendar in the living-room with a disagreeable little shivery shock of surprise. Then it was two weeks, one week, five days—and so much to do. So many things to decide to leave behind; so many things to pack. Three days—and a farewell party at Irene's. Two days—one—and the girls dropping in with little parting presents—a sheaf of train-letters tied together with pale pink ribbon; a box of chocolates; a pin-cushion, the pins forming a somewhat irregular but unmistakable "D"; a needle-book; a handkerchief case with her name in full on the front. And at the last frantic moment the Picketts' farewell offering of a new-laid egg from Cockles, their hen.

Then there was driving in the early, early morning to the station, with her uncle and Mrs. Trustom—Mrs. Trustom very quiet, with her face screwed up and twisted as Dimples remembered it on that long past memorable night of the fatal motor accident.

There was the whistle and rumble of the approaching train; the hissing of the engine as it strained to a standstill. The last hurried good-byes, and then smoothly—swiftly gathering speed—gliding out, leaving them all behind—the station platform, the motor, and Bobs, the chauffeur, touching his cap and smiling; Mrs. Trustom, her face still funny and twisted; Uncle Gus, smiling and waving his hand.

For a little while Dimples sat quite motionless, staring with unseeing eyes through the window.

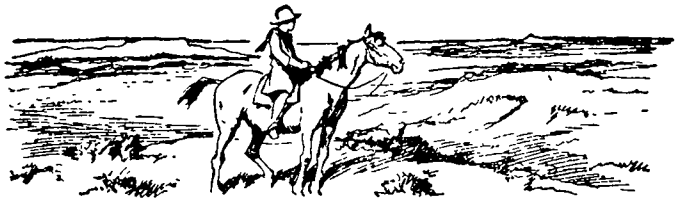
It was a little chirp from Butterball which aroused her—an aggrieved and protesting chirp.

She took the cover off his cage and poked her finger between the bars for him to peck. "We're off, Butterball," she said, "whether we like it or not, we're off!"

The words in a little book which Mrs. Dawson had given her answered her thoughts at the moment, the words of the Indian poetess. Slowly Dimples read them over—

> ". . . to the sunset land,
> The world of prairie, the world of plain,
> The world of promise, and hope, and gain."

There was something curiously comforting, stimulating, about those words. "'The world of promise,' Dimples repeated. "I like the sound of that—'the world of promise and hope and gain.'"



CHAPTER FOUR

NEW FACES

IT was a long journey for the young girl, lonely and unaccompanied save for Butterball, who, though silent at first in his strange surroundings, decided at last to rival the noise of the train with his own merry song. Dimples smiled a little when she heard him. "I knew I'd be glad I brought you," she said.

She had a day and two nights on the train before she reached Winnipeg; there was a change there and travelling for another half-day before she arrived at the prairie town of Mayfield.

It was dark when she reached the station, very dark it seemed, stepping from the well-lighted train out on to the platform.

Dimples' first impressions were confused, remaining always afterwards in her memory as curiously detached little mental pictures—the station sign, swaying in the wind, the letters very black and distinct against a white background, "MAYFIELD." The memory of a stiff, hard voice coming suddenly out of the shadows. "Is it really you, Miss Dimples? My, how you have

grown! Yes, I'm Florence Smithers." The memory of following that voice to a motor, of driving away from the station over a dark, bumpy road to a street where lights twinkled, round a corner and into the shadows again.

Then arriving at the house. That stood out very clearly in her memory—the long narrow hall with the steep stairs directly opposite the front door; the large, high-ceilinged rooms; the big dining-room, with the electric dome over the table. Of trying to eat something and feeling that if she took another mouthful she would choke—choke——

And then being left alone at last in a large room. Were all the rooms in this house so large, she wondered? Alone with Butterball, covered with a dark cloth, asleep on his perch with his head tucked comfortably and securely under his wing. Alone with the prairie wind moaning round the corner of the house. Alone with all the acute heart-breaking loneliness of a motherless little girl.

The little town of Mayfield presented a somewhat friendless aspect to Dimples Adair. There was nothing particularly friendly or companionable about Mrs. Smithers herself, though perhaps she tried to the best of her ability to help the young girl during those first days. "Just make yourself at home!" she said.

"At home!" Dimples echoed silently with a smile ending in a funny little choke that was half a sob.

For it *was* lonely in that big house on Wood Street—in the bedroom while her thoughts flew

back to her own little rose and blue bedroom back home. Lonely in that garden of hardy perennials and sturdy annuals, when she remembered the riotous bloom in the gardens of Cedar Hedges. Lonely, too, in the little town itself with its straight streets, flat-fronted houses, and young Manitoba maple trees; lonely with that ever-present memory of the hill-encircled home town.

"You'll be meeting some young folks your own age when school starts," Mrs. Smithers assured her; "there are nice girls in town; you'll like them, I know."

"There were four walking along Main Street this afternoon," Dimples said. "I thought maybe they'd say hello, but they didn't, just sort of stuck their noses in the air and walked on. And then I met a boy with the reddest hair and he said 'Hello, kid!'"

"A boy with red hair'd be Peter McKay. He's a mischievous young scallywag, that lad."

Dimples smiled at that. "Don't you like boys? Mrs. Trustom didn't either."

"Boys!" Mrs. Smithers said, no more than that, but the snort which followed was far more eloquent than mere words.

Perhaps Dimples might have been surprised if she had known with what interest she was regarded by those girls she had met on Main Street. During those days she was, in fact, their chief topic of conversation, and because of this interest they were already in possession of many facts concerning the young newcomer.

Her real name was Dorothy-Jean, but she was called Dimples—anyone could see why that was.

She was an orphan, but had money of her own, and a guardian who was her uncle who sent her an allowance by cheque every month—so much at least they had found out. " And that," Helen Jones declared, " is worth knowing."

Helen Jones was the undisputed leader of that group of girls. Was not her father the head of Jones' Dry Goods, the largest store in town? Did they not live in Mayfield's finest house on Manitoba Avenue, and keep not only a cook but a housemaid as well—an almost unheard of luxury in Mayfield. And Helen herself was a pretty girl, a keen athlete, and " a real good sport," her friends said.

But Helen's first glimpse of the young stranger who had come to live with Mrs. Smithers had been disquieting. This girl was undeniably pretty. " Prettier than I am," Helen, in front of her mirror, was forced to admit, reluctant but honest. " She's got dimples—dimples ! " Helen repeated the word resentfully, giving her own dimpleless cheek a dab with a vigorous forefinger.

And so Helen Jones made up her mind, quite definitely, that she wasn't going to like this new girl—not one little bit. And because where Helen led the other girls followed, they decided that they were not going to like her either.

They were discussing her one afternoon on the shady verandah of Helen Jones' home. " Just imagine," Nora Hill was saying—Nora was a tall, thin, rather serious looking girl. " Just imagine, she brought a canary in a cage all the way from Ontario, and has him hanging in her room now. Mrs. Smithers told Mrs. Thatcher about

it and Mrs. Thatcher told mother. And Mrs. Smithers says, too, that she has a whole cupboard full of dresses ! "

" Well," Helen said, with a very decisive nod, " she needn't think she's going to swank around and swell it over us ! "

" Not much ! " the others agreed in chorus.

It was not, of course, an auspicious beginning, but Dimples, fortunately, was quite unaware of this somewhat antagonistic and resentful attitude. Just at present her thoughts were too much with the girls back home to be concerned about these others. There was a wistful little droop to her lips these days, lips that were really intended to turn up at the corners and flash the dimples into view.

It was in her letters to her guardian that she relieved her overwrought feelings a little.

> " I just wish somebody would plunk you into a place like this. 'Tisn't Mrs. Smithers' fault that I don't like it, she tries to make me comfortable. But I don't like the house, nor the town, nor anybody in it."

She said something of the same sort in a letter to Mrs. Perry Dawson—

> " I haven't been able to plant any good seed yet. There is nothing here that I don't hate. This house, the stores, the streets——"

But Mrs. Perry Dawson, out of the wisdom of her sympathetic understanding, wrote back—

> " Whatever you do, don't sow seeds of hatred. Try not to be quite so negative,

Dimples, dear. Isn't there a positive side to your new life? Write me a list of the things you like."

"Things I like?" Dimples repeated, after reading that letter, "things I like? Why, there just aren't any."

But there were, of course, she soon found that out, and the list she returned to Mrs. Dawson was concise and to the point—

"Things I like: Butterball. The sun shining on the yellow flowers in the garden. And a boy I see sometimes on Main Street—a boy with red hair, blue eyes, and freckles."

Perhaps, after all, if Dimples had not been lonely she might never have formed that friendship with old Pete Chilliby, and, of course, to know Old Pete was to know February too.

Rotund, jovial, kind-hearted Pete Chilliby was proprietor of the King George Hotel. It stood at the corner of Main and Second Streets, a rather weather-beaten building with, incongruous though they seemed, brightly-blooming flower boxes on the window-ledges.

He watered those flowers in the late afternoons and often eyed Dimples curiously as she passed. And then one day he invited her out to meet Mother Chilliby. That was like Old Pete—kindly, impulsive.

"Mother," he said, "here's the lass from Ontario!"

And so it came about that Dimples would often stop for a chat with Old Pete, and this led on to the

afternoon—the memorable afternoon—when she sallied forth on February's back.

February was Pete Chilliby's horse. Of a morning Mother Chilliby might be seen jogging forth to market; of an evening Old Pete in the bus with February between the shafts, went forth to meet the " eight-fifteen " and any guest for the King George Hotel.

But, as Old Pete pointed out, they did not use February in the afternoons at all. " So you might take him for a trot," he told Dimples. " You say you're used to horses ? "

" Rather ! You should have seen me on Fleet-foot at home ! "

And so it came about that Dimples left Main Street and a little of the heart-sick loneliness behind, and rode out into the prairie land—the prairie of health-giving air and sunlight and far-flung spaces. February seemed to like it too, or perhaps the lightness of the burden he carried, for he ambled along quite nimbly, even breaking into a smart little trot when Dimples turned his nose towards home and oats.

But it furnished Helen Jones with a further topic of conversation. " Look ! " she gasped, one afternoon on Main Street, grasping Sally Maguire's elbow and swinging her round: " there's that Adair girl on old Pete Chilliby's horse ! "

" So it is, sure as fate ! " Sally agreed, her eyes popping wide with astonishment. " Just imagine riding that old nag ! "

Perhaps it was in church that Dimples felt a little more homesick than at any other time during

those first, strange, lonely days. Homesick for the little grey-stone church back in Ontario, with its narrow gothic windows through which the morning sunlight so often fell in multi-coloured shafts of blue and rose and gold.

" This," Dimples told herself, out of the depths of her lonely heart, " this is *ugly !* "

Perhaps she was right. Perhaps it was rather ugly—that little church of the prairie town. Perhaps there was no other word for that musty interior with its bare walls, strip of carpet—blatant glaring red that ran up the aisles and over the pulpit steps. Ugly, too, the straight wooden pews and oblong windows.

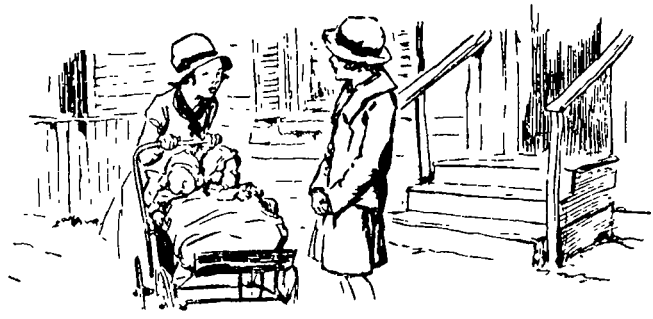
" I just hate it," Dimples told herself, thinking how good Mrs. Smithers always managed to look on Sunday morning.

In front of them sat Mr. and Mrs. Pete Chilliby. An ostrich feather waved in Mrs. Chilliby's hat—a somewhat bedraggled and woebegone feather it was, but in the eyes of Mrs. Pete a feather was a feather for a' that.

But, strange though it seemed to Dimples, after just two or three Sundays, the memory of the home church dimmed. This bare wooden structure, this tiny church in the prairie town of Mayfield became familiar. Familiar, too, the faint musty smell within, the sunbeam that played on the top of Old Pete Chilliby's bald head ; the nodding plume in his wife's hat. And with that familiarity came a little growing sense of affection.

And Dimples came to know, not just then, of course, but little by little as her knowledge of the community grew, that behind it all was sacrifice

and effort. That the " Ladies' Aid " had bought and paid for that red carpet, with the result that each and every member of that society eyed it possessively and proudly on Sunday mornings. That the " Young People," with the proceeds of a self-denial summer, had presented the baptismal font. That sacrifice was the very foundation-stone of that little church, sacrifice on the part of those pioneers of Western Canada who, settling on this new prairie land, had raised there their temple to the praise and glory of God.



CHAPTER FIVE

A HANDFUL OF JEWELS

IT was with relief that Dimples turned from the loneliness of the big house on Oak Street to school life, to the prospect of companionship with other girls. But here things did not go well at first. These " other girls," following the lead of Helen Jones, had made up their vigorous and decisive young minds about this Dimples Adair. She was " different " and " queer," they had decided that ; she must be, they pointed out one to the other, to bring a canary in a cage all the way from Ontario ; and having a cupboard full of clothes ; and dashing off on Old Pete Chilliby's horse and acting as if she liked it.

During those first days at school Dimples unconsciously added insult to injury. She seemed to *enjoy* the lessons, to carry, as Sally Maguire put it, " all those silly answers in her head without having to learn them out of a book ! " And Sally sounded as she felt, very indignant and resentful,

for Sally—round and rosy and easy-going—found it very, very hard to carry anything, especially answers to questions, in her own fair head.

Even Peter McKay, of the twinkly blue eyes, who had extended a shy but friendly, " Hello, kid ! " on Dimples' first morning at school, became a little resentful, for Peter had held the leadership of the class as far as scholarship was concerned, and was not prepared to yield that leadership to a mere girl.

And then Dimples made a mistake. " Do you like Mayfield ? " one of the girls asked.

" No," Dimples answered, " I hate it ! "

And, of course, they had caught it up and passed it around—Dimples could feel their hostility—" She says she hates Mayfield ! "

Perhaps if the real Dimples had come to the surface she might have added, " But that's because I'm homesick and lonely."

But just because she *was* homesick and lonely the real Dimples Adair did not come to the surface at all, but another Dimples took her place—a Dimples who tilted her chin in a defiant little manner which said so plainly, " Well, if you don't like me, you can leave me alone ! "

Very keenly aware now of this critical and unkindly attitude of her schoolmates, perhaps it was but natural that Dimples should take herself off each day after school, away from those girls, from the taunting reminders that she was not one of them.

Sometimes she rode forth on the back of February. Those were the happiest days, of course, with the prairie sun about her and the

prairie wind singing in her ears. On the other days she walked along Main Street, or to the far end of Manitoba Avenue, which ran out on to the prairie itself.

It was on one of these afternoons that she met Opal Flinders.

Opal was one of the Flinders family who lived in the funny little shack standing by itself at the far end of Shannon Street, just before Shannon Street trailed out on to the prairie road. The Flinders were poor, every one knew that. Every one knew, too, that Mr. Flinders had calmly walked off seven months ago and left his wife with four young daughters. And every one knew how Mother Flinders was providing the necessities of life for her stirring and vigorous young family by her daily duties of scrubbing, and cleaning, and general " chores." Pearl, nineteen years old, was working in the bakery ; Opal was at school ; and the twins—well, they were forced to lead a somewhat precarious existence, generally accompanying their mother to work, for it was recognized among Mrs. Flinders' employers that the twins must come along too. Some of those employers declared that they couldn't have them, that if Mrs. Flinders had to bring those tiresome babies, Mrs. Flinders could stay at home. But there were others who recognized that Mrs. Flinders did more work in half a day, twins and all, than other women did in an entire day.

When school was over Opal would call for the twins where her mother was working, considering that hour the brightest in all the day, the hour when she was free to dash for the twins. And it

was a dash. Opal's long, thin, match-like legs testified to that fact.

She was very proud of those little twin sisters of hers. Anyone could tell that. Anyone, that is, who saw her wheeling them up and down every afternoon. Perhaps, after all, she had reason to be proud, for were they not the only twins in town? There were the Popoff triplets in the little village several miles away, but if Opal felt any inward resentment on hearing about them, she gave no outward sign; declared, in fact, that "I'd much rather have twin girls in a family than triplet boys."

Opal knew all about this Dimples Adair, of course. Knew that she was "queer," that she hated Mayfield, that she answered questions in class out of her head as quick as a flash. And on this particular afternoon when she met Dimples on Main Street, Opal would have passed by with a careless little nod, but Dimples, scarcely noticing Opal at all, seeing only the two babies in the carriage, stopped short. "Oh," she exclaimed, "aren't they the sweetest things!"

Now Opal knew those babies were the sweetest things, and knew that every one else must know it too, but certain it was that very few took the trouble to say so.

"Twins?" Dimples was asking.

Opal nodded.

"They're darlings. Would you let me push them? I haven't pushed any babies since—well, not for ever so long."

She had been going to say ever since she had pushed wee David Dawson in his white carriage

with the pink covers, but the memory brought an unexpected little lump into her throat, so she merely grasped the handle of the carriage and walked on with Opal.

" Do you like babies too ? " Opal was asking curiously.

" Who wouldn't ! "

Opal stopped to tuck the covers a little closer about the squirming twins. " I always think anyone'd like our babies. They always seems sort of different to other folks' babies to me. Nicer, I mean. Here, this is our street——" The pride faded suddenly from her voice, and it became almost apologetic as she paused at the corner of Shannon Street. " Thanks for wheelin' them."

" Thanks for letting me ! " Dimples said and turned away, while Opal stared after her. " Thanks for letting me ! " she had said. Opal's mind groped for explanation. Perhaps once she had had little twin sisters. Perhaps she just liked babies—any babies. With a sigh Opal gave up the problem. " The girls say she is queer," she remembered. " Perhaps she is, but it's a nice kind of queerness."

Often after that Dimples might be seen on Main Street with Opal Flinders and the twins. " Which just shows what a funny sort of girl she is," Helen Jones was quick to point out. " Imagine walking up and down wheeling the Flinders' twins ! "

But thus it was that a curious little friendship ripened between Dimples Adair and Opal Flinders.

" Do you know," Dimples asked one afternoon, " I don't even know the names of these babies."

" Didn't I tell you ? " Opal arched out her thin little chest with obvious pride. " Well, it's Crystal and Ruby."

" Crystal and Ruby ? Who named them ? "

" Maw did," Opal declared proudly. " She read somewhere once about a Roman lady—Cornelia-r, I think her name was—and somebody asked where her jewels were, and she pointed to her children and said, ' These are my jewels ! ' Maw says that gave her the idea of namin' us all after jewels. There's Pearl, she's older'n me. Then there's me'n the twins. Maw's named Emmer Jane herself, and she says she didn't want any more named plain like that. She says it's lucky she called us after jewels, for she's never had none of the other kind."

Proudly she removed Ruby's bonnet, exhibiting a tightly-curling mop of hair.

" Red's it can be," she exulted, brushing it upright with a vigorous little hand ; " isn't it lovely for her hair to go'n get red to match her name ! "

Opal did not look much like a jewel at that moment, in her skimpy blue serge dress with the patched elbows. " I think you have a very pretty name," Dimples said slowly, " it makes you think of lovely colours."

" Does it ? "

" Of lovely colours, one melting into the other, of smoothness and light."

" Does it really ? " Opal asked again. " Sometimes I've been sorry, sort of, about my name,

when the kids make fun of it and all——" Opal did not finish the sentence. Silently she was repeating those words, those comforting, reassuring words, " Lovely colours—one melting into the other—smoothness and light——"

It was an afternoon late in September—a golden, sunshiny sort of afternoon—when Opal told Dimples about the forthcoming party. " It's next week," she explained, " and it's a class party. Miss Rutherford is having it at her house. You'll be coming, of course ? "

" I haven't been asked."

" But nobody is, everybody is," Opal explained incoherently, " the whole class is invited. We'll have heaps of fun. You must come."

The very next morning Nora Hill, the president of the class, spoke to Dimples about it. " You'll be sure and come to our party ? " she asked, hesitating a little over her words, " I—I think you'll enjoy it."

And then Miss Rutherford mentioned it. " I'm expecting you, Dimples," she said.

" I'll be there ! " Dimples promised.

And so, for the first time since coming to Mayfield, from her cupboard she brought forth the little white georgette party frock. For the first time she was looking ahead—eagerly, hopefully. A party ! A week—five days—three days more.

And then on the afternoon of the party itself she found little Opal Flinders down in the cloakroom at school with her face buried in the folds of her coat. " Sobbing ! " Dimples realized.

" What's the matter ? " she asked, alarmed. " Opal, what is it ? "

Little by little it all came out. Opal, it seemed, had to stay at home on this night of nights to look after the twins.

" But why ? Where's your mother ? "

" She's got to work. And Pearl, she's goin' out with her best beau."

" I thought your mother worked in the daytime."

" So she does, 'most always, and nights too when she gets the chance. 'Tisn't fair—oh——" Opal's voice rose hysterically, " 'tisn't fair ! "

" Opal, listen to me, listen ! Let's get out of here and see what we can do. I've got an idea."

And the idea which Opal listened to was nothing more or less than the suggestion that she, Dimples Adair, should stay with the twins while Opal went to the party.

Opal stared at her out of incredulous, tear-wet eyes.

" You're not meanin' it ? "

" I am. I don't mind—much. Anyhow, the party means more to you because you know the girls better than I do."

" No," Opal said, in a would-be determined voice, " that wouldn't be fair neither. They're our twins, not yours. It's up to me——" Despite her efforts her voice broke.

But Opal was open to persuasion. A few minutes later and it was all settled. Opal was to go to the party at the given time, Dimples was to be at the house on Shannon Street when Mrs. Flinders left at seven.

Mother Flinders let Dimples into the shabby

little house that evening, Mother Flinders with a smile in her faded eyes.

" It's kind of you to come," she said. " Opal, she was that het up and excited. 'Tisn't many parties she's had the chance of."

Dimples looked at the little woman facing her in the tiny, dim hall—this little mother of Pearl, and Opal, and Crystal and Ruby. " I'll just love to stay with your twins," she said.

The tired face of the little woman lighted up with a smile. " I was expectin' to be in myself to-night," she explained, " but when the chance of extra work comes I've got to go. Opal's promised to get back early, so you hop off's soon as she comes."

It was very quiet after the little woman had gone. " Rather spooky," Dimples thought nervously, for there was none of the clear, daylight glare of electricity that flooded Mrs. Smithers' rooms, only the light from the flickering tongue of flame of the coal-oil lamp, a tongue of flame that smoked the glass and cast queer, eerie shadows over the walls and ceiling.

It was almost a relief when Crystal rolled herself out of bed and voiced her protest in vigorous, prolonged howls, whereupon Ruby woke up and howled too.

But there was something human and companionable about those howls and they quieted at once when Dimples sang of how—

" ' Wynken, Blynken, and Nod one night
Sailed off in a wooden shoe,
Sailed in a river of mystic light
Into a sea of dew.' "

It really didn't have the effect of sending them to sleep, so delighted and enthralled were they over this unusual and unexpected performance.

A few minutes after ten Opal came home—Opal, breathless with excitement. " It was the wonderfullest party," she gasped, " the *most* fun ! We played all sorts of games and I almost got a prize. And we had the scrummiest supper—heaps to eat, such heaps to eat——" Opal repeated the phrase, almost as if doubting the evidence of her own memory, " sandwiches'n cocoa'n ice-cream'n cake—oh, it *was* swell ! "

Opal had gone to that party with the intention of telling the girls about Dimples, that Dimples was staying behind to take care of Crystal and Ruby, so that she, Opal Flinders, could come to the party. And she had intended to add, right out loud and strong, that Dimples Adair was a peach !

And then she had forgotten all about it. Forgotten about Dimples, the twins, everything, in the joyous excitement of that party.

Remorsefully she stared at Dimples across the lamp-lit room. Then, from her pocket, she produced an orange. She really wanted to thank Dimples and tell her that she was a *dear*. That no one had ever done so nice a thing for her before. But all she really said was, " Here, I brought this for you from the party."

And so, carrying the orange, Dimples went home, hurrying along Main Street, where all the little stores were closed and dark, but with the street lights making the way bright and familiar.

Because Opal had really torn herself away early

from the party, Dimples met the others on their way home as she turned into Oak Street.

They stared at her, their amazement very evident. Here was this girl, whom they had specially invited to the party and who had not turned up, walking along Main Street at half-past ten—*carrying an orange!*

Some one voiced that amazement in a question. "You weren't at the party?"

"No," Dimples said shortly, sensing their critical attitude, "I wasn't."

Most certainly, she decided, as she ran along Wood Street towards home, if Opal hadn't told them where she was, she wouldn't either. "They're saying to each other now, I know, what a queer sort of girl I am. Well, let them! It was worth not going to ten parties to see little Opal so happy." And she smiled, remembering the laughter in Opal's eyes, and the words of the little mother, "'Tisn't many parties she's had the chance of!"

Meanwhile those girls were remarking, just as Dimples had foretold, that they had always known she was funny, but that this was proof. "Just imagine, my dear, on Main Street at half-past ten o'clock at night, carrying an orange!" While they were calling good-night as they parted at their respective corners, another young girl was thinking about Dimples Adair.

Opal Flinders was in bed, far, far too excited to sleep. "The girls say she's queer," she was thinking. "She is too—awful queer! None of them would have stayed and let me go to the party. I wouldn't have done it for any of them

either. She *is* queer, and different, and a darling ! "

On a sudden impulse Opal Flinders screwed her eyes up very tight. " O God," she prayed fervently in the darkness, " Oh God, make all us girls here in Mayfield just like her ! "



CHAPTER SIX

PETER SHOW-OFF

IT was the beginning of October now. There was a tang in the early mornings, a sharpness in the air at night; and the little Manitoba maple tree by Mrs. Smithers' gate glinted gold in the sunlight. And with the earlier dusk the sunset colour changed from the rosy glow of summer skies to the clear, green-gold of autumn.

Peter McKay was swinging on that gate under the maple tree while he talked to Dimples one sunny afternoon. He had been sent by his mother to borrow a patent egg-beater from Mrs. Smithers and had to wait while Mrs. Smithers finished beating up a cake with the beater in question.

Peter was ruffled and indignant and feeling very antagonistic toward this Dimples Adair who was facing him. Just that morning in school, the result of a test given the day before had been posted up, and the name of Dimples Adair had topped the list.

"Aha, Pete," one of the girls had teased, "you got left this time."

"Oh, shut up!" Peter had growled.

But it was not a happy memory, rather it stimu-

lated him with a desire to " get even " with this Dimples Adair.

" See here," he told her suddenly, swinging the gate to and fro with his toe, " even if you did top that list this morning, you needn't be thinking you'll come out head every time."

Dimples stared at him. " Oh ? And who do you think'll come out head ? "

Peter was seldom bashful. " I think I will, of course."

" Then," Dimples told him, tilting her chin in that defiant little manner which had become so familiar of late, " perhaps you've got another think coming ! "

Peter swung indignantly back and forth until the little gate creaked protestingly.

" Hi, there, boy ! " a voice made itself heard from the pantry window, " get off that gate ! "

Peter eyed the invisible Mrs. Smithers with wrath in his blue eyes as he slid to the ground, but, because she was invisible and unassailable, he directed that wrath towards Dimples.

" I just guess," he remarked, " I just guess that back where you come from you never saw flowers's big as those," he indicated the great golden sunflowers.

" Oh, those ! " Dimples scoffed. " Why, in Ontario we wouldn't be bothered with them. We wouldn't have 'em in our gardens—not our nice gardens ! " and she wrinkled her nose disdainfully at the sunflowers which were really looking very beautiful in the mellow light of the afternoon sun.

" That the bird you brought on the train ? " Peter asked, his eyes on a cage in the window.

Dimples nodded. "Butterball. He's the dearest——"

"He can't sing so extra."

"He can so!" Dimples defended the little songster with more vigour than politeness. "He used to sing on the train and folks thought he sang beautifully."

"There's an old black cat down our street that could swallow him in one gulp."

Dimples eyes flashed. "He's better not try!"

Peter tried another subject. "Is everybody back in Ontario a pasty-face like you?"

Which remark quite merited the retort, "Pasty-face? Pasty-face? I'm not a pasty-face! And anyhow, I'd rather be pasty-faced than smudged all over with freckles like you are."

They were both, at the moment, just bristling with indignation, and being indignant it was so easy to be cross and unkind, and easier still to get crosser and unkinder all the time.

A little later and Peter had taken himself and the egg-beater off toward home, but not before he had asked, quite casually, just as he was going out at the gate, "Coming to the hike on Sat.?"

"Hike?"

Peter nodded. "The boys of the class are inviting the girls for a hike up the river. Of course with girls along it'll only be a walk, not really a hike at all——"

Dimples flared up again. "Won't it though! I just guess girls could out-hike you any time."

"Girls!" Peter scoffed. "Are you—are you coming?"

"I don't know. I haven't been asked."

" Well, y'are now," Peter said, very gruffly, and stalked off importantly in his high rubber boots.

Dimples turned back into the garden where the sunflowers were a flash of gold in the sunlight.

" Perhaps it was mean of me to say we wouldn't have them in our nice gardens," she thought, eyeing their golden beauty, " but that Peter Show-off just made me mad. He needn't think he's going to call me pasty-face and names like that. And yet——" she frowned over the problem, " he invited me to that hike. Boys *are* queer ! "

Peter trudged along the muddy road where the little rain-pools caught and held glints of the bright sky above. His thoughts ran back over that conversation with Dimples. " She makes me mad, sort of," he was thinking now. " I hope she comes to the hike . . . I'll show her what a real hike is . . . smudged with freckles, she said . . . pasty-face, that's what she is ! If she comes I'll show her a thing or two. Girls are crazy . . . I hope she comes. . . ."

Saturday was just everything that a Saturday afternoon should be—everything that an October afternoon on the prairies can be—blue sky above ; a racing, rollicking, joyous little wind sweeping in from the plains ; sunlight flooding the earth.

They were all there—the boys, proud hosts of the day ; the girls—Helen Jones, from the big house on Manitoba Avenue, Opal Flinders from the tiny shack on Shannon Street—with their voices high and shrill with excitement.

It was necessary, the hosts decided, that they

should eat at once, though it was but four o'clock. But, as Bob Harris pointed out with evident common sense, " What's the use of waiting when there's hot dogs to be et ? "

And so the fire was built by none other than the Rev. David Grant himself who, as Peter McKay explained, had been invited because " he was a regular fellow even if he was a minister." And over that fire the buns toasted and burnt to a crisp at the edges ; the cocoa boiled over ; the bacon spluttered and sizzled ; and altogether it was just the most hunger-satisfying feast that it was possible for it to be.

And just before they feasted around the fire, David Grant called them to attention. Clearly on the air the young voices rose—

" ' We thank you for the food we eat,
We thank you for the birds that sing,
We thank you for this happy day,
We thank you, God, for everything.' "

And after the feasting was over, after even Bob Harris was satisfied—Bob was big and fat and so hollow that he was terribly hard to fill up—then the fire was carefully stamped out and games and races began. There was one race in which little fleet-footed Opal Flinders beat Tom Hill, the best boy runner. Just for a second or two Tom showed his chagrin, said he'd let her win, and when the girls cried " Oh ! oh ! " added that you couldn't expect a fellow to run after having a bun-feed. Then suddenly he bethought himself, and grinning cheerfully at the winner, said, right out loud too, that Opal was a peach of a runner and he didn't mind being beaten by her, not a bit.

And little Opal Flinders, overcome with shyness and embarrassment, clung very tightly to Dimples Adair and blushed to the tips of her ears.

So it might have passed off without any mishap at all.

It was Peter McKay who thought of the boat, who remembered that just a stone's-throw down the river old Farmer Rodgers had a boat which he had lent to them on a previous picnic. Peter and Bob Harris, turning the thought into action, set off to see Farmer Rodgers, and appeared a little later in triumphant possession of the boat and an old canoe as well. It so happened that David Grant and some of the boys had set out for a tramp over the prairie, or, as Peter himself remarked, " Perhaps he'd have put a stopper on our fun with this spiffy canoe ! "

And then Peter started to show off.

He shot the canoe forward. He swung it around in a dizzy curve and shot forward again. He dived in toward the shore, then, grinning derisively back over his shoulder at those who were pleading, " Oh, come on, Pete, give us a chance ! " shot swiftly and noiselessly out into mid-stream again.

He had seen that Dimples Adair was watching him. That was sufficient. He paddled around in still more swirling eddies, his thoughts swirling too. " She'll see how strong I am. She'll see what a swell paddler I am ! She'll see——"

But what Dimples Adair saw at that moment was outside Peter's expectations. She heard a splash. She saw an overturned canoe.

There was a second of silence on the shore.

Then an audible gasp of relief. Peter had bobbed up. He would strike out and swim for shore, of course.

But Peter did not strike out—he seemed to try and fail. Seemed to splash without moving. Seemed to cry out——

Some one on shore grasped the truth—some one flung it out in a whisper, " His foot's caught in the rope ! "

And Peter called, they all heard him quite distinctly, " Help ! "

Then—well, of course, Bob Harris was throwing off his coat, and Tom Hill was kicking off his shoes, oh, the boys were ready for rescue. But at that moment there was a splash, a plunge, and Dimples Adair was wading out—wading—striding —swimming. Dimples Adair was grabbing Peter McKay by the collar and holding him in a tight, vice-like grip. " Kick ! " she gasped, " Kick ! "

Peter, choking and spluttering, kicked against that rope which seemed to tug, to pull him down, down. " It's all right," her voice was saying in his ear, " I'll hold you—the others are coming ! "

Peter was very hazy as to exactly what happened after that. Some one held him up, held him against that rope which was pulling him down, down. Some one was talking, reassuringly. " They're coming—here they are——" And then suddenly the hold on his ankle was released and he was free, free to relax to the guidance of those hands which were leading him in toward shore.

He was a very uncomfortable boy when he finally realized what had happened. Very uncom-

fortable as he met the accusing light in David Grant's eyes, David Grant who had returned from the prairies to the scene of the mishap ; uncomfortable under those words of his companions. " It was that Adair girl who got there first. She's some swimmer ! " Oh, unforgettable was the memory of himself in the canoe, showing off—tipping—" Oh, shucks ! " Peter said, and stretched himself out in the sun to dry.

The attention, however, was shifting from Peter on the discovery that there were " hot dogs " left. " And," the boys were asking, " shall we eat them now ? "

Peter shut his eyes. He didn't want to see " hot dogs " ever again, he decided. Nor canoes, nor girls—girls named Dimples especially. What in the world, he asked himself, had the fellows been about anyway, when he needed help out there ? Why hadn't they struck out at once instead of letting a girl do it ? A girl ! Peter snorted indignantly. A girl ! And that Adair girl of all girls in the world !

But when it was over, after they had finished the " hot dogs "—Peter finding to his surprise that he was actually hungry after all—then it was that the real Peter McKay came to the surface. The Peter of the honest blue eyes, and the merry, irresistible grin. He wouldn't have been Peter McKay at all if he had not gone down to Mrs. Smithers' house that evening and asked if he could speak to Dimples. He was secretly rather terrified of Mrs. Smithers—her lips were so tight, and her eyes so hard that they seemed to bore holes straight through to your backbone.

And it was the real Peter who grinned up at Dimples as she stood at the top of the steps a moment or two later. " It was jolly decent of you to come in and help me out of the water," he started, without waste of unnecessary words. " I couldn't do a thing with that rope round my foot. It was great of you, awfully brave, you know," which was really a tremendous admission for Peter to make to a girl.

" Oh, that's all right," Dimples said, feeling and looking rather uncomfortable, " the others were coming too, only I got there first."

" I wish——" Peter confessed, in a sudden outburst of honesty, " I wish you'd been drowning so's I could have saved you instead. I sort of hate being saved by a girl."

And then they both laughed, and that laugh broke down all barriers of restraint and embarrassment, and swept the last little lurking grudge of resentment out of both young hearts.

Peter trudged off a little later, his hands deep in his pockets, his cap on the back of his head, a whistle on his lips—a little aimless tuneless whistle, but it indicated that all was well with the world of Peter McKay.

Dimples was very thoughtful as she watched him disappear down the road and round the corner. It had been nice of him to come, and it had not been easy, she realized that. And then suddenly she laughed outright, for, after all, there was something contagious about even the memory of Peter's honest grin, and the twinkle in his blue, blue eyes.

It was dusk now, though there was an amber

light in the sky which deepened to a sunset gold in the west. In that bright light Butterball's cage flashed yellow in the window. Dimples, catching sight of it, remembered the words they had all said together at the picnic, and repeated them softly as she stood there—

" We thank you for the birds that sing,
We thank you for this happy day,
We thank you, God, for everything."



CHAPTER SEVEN

ALONG THE LONE WOLF TRAIL

AFTER that picnic Dimples noticed a change in the attitude of her classmates. To strike into the deep water and hold Peter McKay until help arrived had been a very brave thing to do—every one was willing to admit that. Every one, that is, but Helen Jones.

"Oh, piff!" she scoffed, in answer to Sally Maguire's statement that Dimples Adair had shown a lot of pluck. "She wanted to attract attention, that's what she was after. The boys were all ready to go when she jumped in, making an awful splash about it, too."

"I think," Sally whispered to Nora Hill, "I think Helen's jealous."

But neither Sally Maguire nor Nora Hill had the moral courage to make that remark to Helen herself.

"I'd rather like," Sally added, "to tell Dimples Adair how brave I think she was, but it's sort of

hard to say a thing like that after we've snubbed her so."

But perhaps Dimples caught the spirit behind the act when Sally pushed a sharpened pencil across the desk when the point of Dimples' pencil broke, and when Nora offered her a rosy-cheeked apple at recess. Perhaps she caught in these shy advances the little undercurrent of friendliness.

But there was nothing backward about the expression of Opal Flinders' admiration. "It was awful brave of you to jump into the water like that," she said one afternoon, as she trundled the twins along Main Street. "I'd have been scared stiff. I wouldn't have done it, no, not for anything."

"Not even if the twins had fallen in?"

Opal grinned at that. "Oh, of course I'd go in after *them!*" she said.

They had turned into Shannon Street and Opal was eyeing the forlorn little shack rather wistfully. "Doesn't look much of a house when you look at it, does it?" she asked, "but we like it, me'n maw."

"You like any place that's home, I think. I loved Cedar Hedges."

"Was that really the name of your house?"

Dimples nodded. "There were cedar hedges all round the gardens."

"Once," Opal confessed, a little shyly, "me'n maw thought of namin' our house. We got the loveliest name—you'd never guess——"

"What was it?"

"The Twinnery. Because of the twins, you

see. We still call it that ourselves, but maw said that if we put the name up over the door she was afraid folks'd think we was tryin' to put on too much style. Maw says she never wants folks to think that of her—never."

Dimples repeated this in a letter to Mrs. Perry Dawson—

> "You'd love little Opal Flinders. She wears an old blue serge dress which is too small and too short, and has patches in the elbows. And her hair is straight and stringy, but you'd love her just the same."

It was one Saturday morning that Dimples discovered a piano in Mrs. Smithers' front parlour. The room was opened only for special occasions and for its Saturday morning turning out. Mrs. Smithers, though living in the midst of a new and progressive community, retained many old-fashioned ideas. And because her mother back home in the Maritime provinces had a front parlour opened only occasionally, Mrs. Smithers had an unused front parlour too.

"May I try the piano?" Dimples asked on this particular morning when the open windows disclosed the contents of the usually darkened room.

Mrs. Smithers looked a little shocked. "It was a wedding present. I don't want it tampered with."

"But I won't tamper with it. I only want to practise."

At length Mrs. Smithers gave a reluctant consent. "Play very soft and gentle," she said.

" I'd feel bad if anything happened to it after all these years."

But there was little satisfaction to be drawn from that piano. Many of its notes were quite dumb. Others, under pressure, emitted a flat, tinny sound. Dimples closed the lid with a little shining teardrop of disappointment trembling on her eyelashes.

Mrs. Smithers was obviously relieved when the young girl so soon gave up the idea of practising. " I hated to say no to the child," she told herself, " but it does a piano no good to be thumped. It's better for her to listen to the radio."

The radio was in the dining-room. It had been presented to Mrs. Smithers by the " Ladies Aid " after five years' service as treasurer of the Association, and was therefore a much-prized possession. Dimples wrote about it to Mrs. Perry Dawson—

> " You asked me to make a list of the things I like here, and I told you some. The radio is another. I just love it. Mrs. Smithers is very proud of it, but I don't believe she cares what comes *through* it at all. We were listening last night, at least I was, and the music was so lovely that it made me all shivery and thrilly. And right then Mrs. Smithers asked ' Would you like your egg boiled or poached in the morning ? ' Eggs ! Eggs ! Can you imagine that—eggs right in the middle of that music ! "

It was her rides on February that Dimples enjoyed more than anything those early autumn afternoons—running down after school to the

King George Hotel, where February would be waiting in the yard; trotting along Main Street after waving good-bye to Old Pete; turning on to Blossom Avenue to Manitoba, and finally out on to the prairie itself. This particular road, ever since Pete Chilliby had reported having seen a wolf cross its track, had taken to itself the picturesque name of the Lone Wolf Trail.

It was on one of these afternoons when Dimples had explored a little farther than usual along the trail that she came unexpectedly upon the village of Goodcontent. Such a funny little place it was, a prairie settlement of a few buildings—a tiny church, schoolhouse, post office, and tall grain elevator.

It was after she had left the village of Goodcontent that she passed the McPherson farm. She might not have noticed it at all had not February suddenly developed a limp, and she was forced to turn him in at the first gate. And it was while the farmhand was extracting the stone from his shoe that Mrs. Sandy McPherson came out to invite her in. Mrs. Sandy, as she was affectionately called, had a broad face, clear honest eyes, and the brogue of bonny Scotland on her tongue.

"Come on in," she said, "the bairns will be glad to see you."

It was a big kitchen in which Dimples found herself—a big, airy, friendly sort of kitchen, with broad windows looking out over the prairie.

Two "bairns" answered their mother's summons—Sarah and Wee Sandy, who subjected Dimples to frank critical stares.

"We heard about you," Mrs. Sandy was saying. "We don't hear much out here on our prairie, but we heard about you."

"About me?" Dimples repeated, surprised. "Perhaps you've made a mistake. There's nothing to hear about me."

Mrs. Sandy smiled. "Oh yes. Mrs. Smithers was telling Sandy himself when he was in town to market on Saturday about you bringing the wee dicky bird all the way on the train."

"Oh, Butterball! I couldn't leave him behind."

"Butterball?" Little Sarah's curiosity triumphed over shyness. "Is that your bird's name?"

Dimples nodded. "He's as round and yellow as a ball of butter."

The little girl smiled, and when she smiled there was something very attractive about the plain, honest, little face of Sarah McPherson.

"We didn't bring anything like that with us," she said. "We've got horses'n cows'n chickens, but they're Canadian. We were Scotch, but now we're Canadian too."

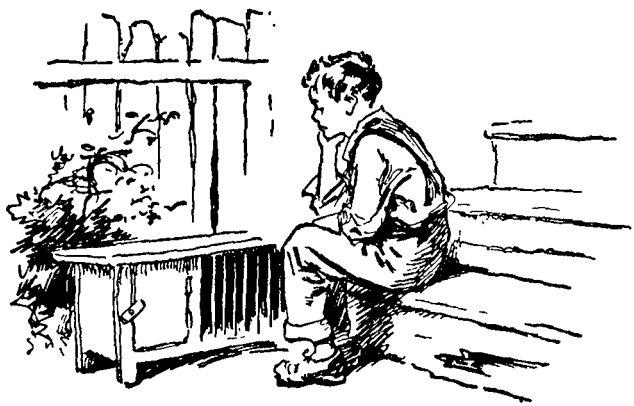
Sarah's mother nodded. "Our lass has been to school down in Goodcontent, and the teacher's been telling them it's a bonny fine thing to be a Canadian."

It was a fortunate discovery for Dimples Adair, that of the McPherson farm. Often of an afternoon, after that first visit, when she could make an early start, she would turn February's head in that direction, trot gaily through the village of Goodcontent, along the road and up the McPherson drive.

" Dimples, oh Dimples," the shrill cries of Sarah and Wee Sandy would greet her. " We're ever so glad you've come. Let's go out to the barn."

Perhaps sometimes it all called up a homesick little memory, for there had been a barn back home with a fragrant hay-loft, and busy, clucking hens. But there was little time for backward-looking thoughts when Wee Sandy was around, for, being at that persistent, interrogative small-boy stage, he demanded constant attention with his " one million hows, two million wheres, and seven million whys."

But it was always with reluctance that Dimples turned February toward home, always regretfully she left them, turning at the gate to wave good-bye to the mother and " bairns " at the door ; three, with the light of the setting sun in their faces, who were learning of the new land that it was a bonny fine thing to be a Canadian.



CHAPTER EIGHT

THE EMPTY HUTCH

THERE was much about the little town of Mayfield that was becoming familiar to Dimples: Wood Street with its maple trees, bronze and gold now, with occasional flashes of red; Shannon Street, at the other end of the town; Blossom Avenue in between, with its cosy, comfortable little homes. Dimples learned to recognize certain landmarks too—the green ash tree which had been struck by lightning in the big storm last summer; the house with the workshop behind where lived John Kenwood, the village carpenter.

It seemed quite natural now to wave to the Rev. David Grant as he whizzed past in his battered little car in which he covered the prairie trails so quickly; natural, too, to call good-morning to Mother Chilliby—cheerful and com-

placent behind February—as she set off for her day's shopping in the little shops of Main Street.

Even Main Street was familiar now :

> " I don't like it," Dimples wrote to her uncle, " there's not a store with a pretty window in the whole bunch. I said that to Peter McKay and he said I didn't know what I was talking about. He said he could stand for hours and look at the sausages in Riggs, the butcher's, or at the buns in Mrs. Thatcher's. He said they were swell looking windows."

Perhaps the view that Dimples took of it is how it might have appeared to any stranger : Main Street, with its stores and merchandise ; Burnette's Grocery, and its rival Allen's Cash-and-Carry ; Riggs, the butcher ; Hobbs, the baker ; and Kerr's Electric Shop all in a row—the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker.

But to the affections of the townsfolk Main Street was bound with invisible hoops of steel. There was in their hearts the pride of possession. Pete Chilliby tried to explain it to Dimples one afternoon. " It belongs to us, it's our street, we're proud of it," he said. He was watering his flowers at the time and did not notice the surprise in Dimples' eyes. " That's why we clean our windows, and polish our brass, and water our flowers—because we're proud of our street."

" We're proud of our street ! " That expressed the sentiments of the townsfolk—exactly.

Peter McKay, walking along Main Street that early October afternoon, most certainly was not

thinking about it—you could tell that by the far-away look in his blue eyes. Even Thatcher's window, with its enticing display of cakes and buns, which usually commanded a good share of his thoughts, failed to draw attention. Peter, jingling something that clinked in his pocket, was thinking about the rabbit.

All his life, or, at least, ever since he could remember, Peter had wanted a rabbit, ever since he was a very little chap and had called it " wabbit." And now Bob Harris had offered his bunny for a consideration of thirty-five cents, and Peter, by dint of running errands and doing sundry odd jobs, had at last acquired the desired sum. To-morrow morning he was to become the proud possessor and lawful owner of Nibbles, the rabbit. Feeling that precious thirty-five cents actually between his fingers, he forgot everything but that to-morrow the rabbit would be his—the cute little white, white rabbit with the long, wiggly ears.

At that moment Bob Harris's thoughts were also centring themselves around that self-same rabbit.

It so happened that an auction sale had taken place that afternoon in Cole's second-hand furniture store, and Bob, propelled by boyish curiosity and desire to be " in at " any unusual event, had wandered in, fascinated by the pleading of Tim Hooley, the auctioneer. " What am I offered for this chair—this strong, sturdy, serviceable chair ? Five dollars ? *Five dollars !* " Oh, the scorn in his voice. " Five—and—a quarter ? Five-and-a-quarter. Five-fifty ? Five-fifty !

Five-fifty! Going—going——" It was really intensely dramatic. "Going—going—gone!"

Deeply impressed with it all, an idea had taken root in the fertile brain of Bob Harris. During supper he thought it over carefully. Why not have an auction sale for his rabbit? It was silly—and the more he thought about it the sillier it seemed—letting Peter McKay have him for thirty-five cents when an auction sale might bring forty, forty-five, even fifty!

"Sure, why not?" Bob demanded of himself.

To that end he spent the evening printing a card, and with the morning hung out a flag in front of the house, for so Cole's had done in front of their store, theirs being only a plain red flag, while his was the Union Jack and so much the better. His card he displayed underneath:

"AUCTION SALE

OF

NIBBLES, THE RABBIT,

THIS MORNING—SATURDAY—

AT 10 A.M.

COME

AND BRING YOUR MONEY WITH YOU."

The news spread quickly, of course. Auction sale of Nibbles, the rabbit! It was novelty enough to draw a crowd.

Peter McKay protested furiously. Arriving early he had seen the flag, read the card, and then bounced in on Bob. "Look here," he said, "you

can't do that. 'Tisn't fair. You said you'd sell me that there rabbit for thirty-five cents. Whatcher mean by an auction sale ? "

" A feller can change his mind, can't he ? " Bob demanded. " I'm auctioning my rabbit. If you're the highest bidder, y'get him. If y'aren't, y'don't ! "

" If y'aren't, y'don't ! " the words rang like a knell in Peter McKay's ears.

Bob held up the rabbit. " What am I offered," he demanded, in strong imitation of Tim Hooley's voice and words, " for this rabbit—this strong, sturdy, reliable rabbit ? "

" Ten cents ! " the squeaky, scared little treble belonged to Jimmy Hill.

Bob ignored the interruption. " For this strong, sturdy, reliable rabbit. What am I offered ? "

" A quarter ! " some one called.

This was worthy of notice. " A quarter ! " Bob scoffed, trying to copy Tim Hooley's scorn. " A quarter for this here rabbit ! A quarter for *him !* Look at his ears. Y'never saw a rabbit with such swell ears before ! "

" Thirty cents ! " a voice interrupted.

" Thirty cents—thirty cents——"

" Thirty-five ! " it was Peter McKay—Peter with his eyes anxious and his heart pumping fast. " 'N stop right there, Bob."

But Bob had no intention of stopping if there was any chance of the bidding going on. " Thirty-five for this here rabbit, with his long white ears, this strong—sturdy——"

" Thirty-six ! " this from Tom Hill.

" Thirty-seven ! " Peter added, suddenly re-

membering the extra two cents in the little bank at home.

" Thirty-seven, thirty-seven—for this beootiful, grass-eating rabbit—thirty-seven——"

" Forty ! " a voice offered.

There was a little gasp of amazement.

" Forty ! " Bob repeated, trying to keep the jubilant note out of his voice—the auction was undoubtedly proving a huge success. " Only forty cents for this grass-eating rabbit——"

" I say, Bob," it was Peter, close up to the front now, " if I say fifty 'll you let me pay thirty-seven now and the rest next month ? "

Bob hesitated. Fifty ! It was a tempting offer. And if Peter said he'd pay, he would, there was no doubt on that score. He raised his voice, warmed to the *rôle* of auctioneer. " Fifty ! Fifty I'm bid for this long-eared, grass-eating, strong, sturdy, reliable rabbit ! Going—going——"

" One dollar ! "

There was silence—a heavy, stunned silence. One dollar some one had said. And that some one was Dimples Adair.

" One dollar," she called out again, clearly across that silence. " I said one dollar ! "

" All right," Bob regained his breath. " Y' can have him. Where's the dollar ? "

They changed hands, a new, crisp, one-dollar bill—they all saw it—and the rabbit. The long-eared, grass-eating, strong, sturdy, reliable rabbit. And, holding him closely, snugly, in her arms, Dimples turned and walked off.

It had been a sudden, but perhaps very natural impulse which had prompted Dimples Adair to

bid for and acquire that rabbit. She had been feeling lonely, and homesick and miserable when she joined that group at the auction sale in Bob Harris's back-yard. The extra wave of homesickness having been caused, of course, by the remembrance that this was little David Dawson's birthday—wee David Dawson back home. And the thought had brought the homesickness surging back. Perhaps it had its part in making her bid up for the rabbit. Perhaps she thought that loneliness might fade when she held the rabbit in her arms and felt the sleek smoothness of his fur.

That afternoon she sat on Mrs. Smithers' back steps and watched him. There was something curiously comforting in the thought that he belonged to her. " You're mine, Nibbles," she said aloud, " mine—mine ! "

She felt a little twinge of regret when she remembered the obvious eagerness of Peter McKay. " If I'd have known he was the one bidding for him, I wouldn't have done it," she thought. " I couldn't see who it was from where I stood. Well, anyway, he's got his money and I've got the rabbit. That's fair. P'raps he didn't want Nibbles—not so awfully bad."

It was a little later that Mrs. Smithers sent Dimples down to the King George Hotel for fresh eggs. It seemed an unlikely place to acquire fresh eggs, but Mrs. Pete Chilliby was a thrifty and enterprising woman, and in the few spare moments at her disposal, ran a small but highly successful poultry business. And when eggs were many and guests were few she sold these off to the townsfolk.

On this particular evening Mrs. Chilliby was bustling around the big kitchen of the King George. "Five extra guests coming on the eight-fifteen," she explained, when Dimples presented herself. "Run on out to the shed, dearie, and gather what eggs are left."

To Dimples Adair the old shed was a delightful place. Something—perhaps the hay, perhaps the cluck-clucking of the hens—brought it all so clearly and vividly back to memory—the high, airy, sweet-smelling barn back home; the little, dusty shafts of sunshine that had sent long inquiring rays through the chinks in the roof and walls; the flutter of pigeons in the shadows of the eaves.

She raised her hand and dashed away a tear from the corner of her eye—a lonely, homesick little tear. "Silly!" she told herself impatiently.

At that moment she noticed the knot-hole—one of those delightfully enticing knot-holes that just cries out, "Oh, come and peep through me!"

It was a back-yard into which Dimples looked through that knot-hole, a rather poor back-yard, she could see that at once.

But it was a boy who caught and held her attention, a boy sitting on the lowest of the steps—Peter McKay, of the red hair, and freckles, and twinkly blue eyes.

He was sitting quite motionless, a forlorn, dejected figure, staring fixedly at something on the ground.

Dimples raised herself on tiptoe the better to see what that something might be.

Then she gave a start. "Oh!" she gasped, so

that it is almost a wonder the boy did not hear. " Oh ! "

She withdrew from the knot-hole and leaned back against the wall. " Oh, the poor kid ! It's a hutch he's staring at—I just guess he made it himself—a little, empty, rabbit-hutch ! "

At that moment the real Dimples Adair rose to the surface—impulsive, warm-hearted Dimples Adair. She was out of the door of the old shed and across the yard like the proverbial streak of greased lightning. She was on Main Street, past the stores, past this corner, and the next. She was on Wood Street, round the house, through the gate and into the garden.

Stooping, she picked up the white rabbit. " Nibbles," she gasped, breathless with the run, " Nibbles, you've got to go ! "

She was on Main Street again, hurrying along under the trees with the little white bunny held very close. " It serves you right, Dimples Adair," she was telling herself severely, " serves you jolly well right for being so greedy. But even if you have been greedy, you can't be mean—no ! "

It was dusk now, and above, in the clear blue of the western sky, a star twinkled. " I wonder," Dimples thought suddenly, " if that star looks anything like the star which the Wise Men followed when they took their gifts to the little Jesus."

It was a whimsical thought and faded as she turned off Main Street.

It was but the matter of minutes to find the house with the yard that backed up to the King George Hotel. Another few minutes to make her way round the side and into the yard itself. And

then she was facing the boy—an obviously startled, very much surprised boy.

" Here y'are," Dimples said, holding out the white bunny. " You can have him."

Peter McKay stared, first at the girl, then at the rabbit.

" I mean it. I don't know what made me bid up. I didn't want him as much as you did."

Peter stood up, shoved his hands into his pockets, and found his voice. " I haven't got a dollar," he said.

There was something very likeable about him at that moment. Something that made you realize that under the red hair and freckles there was a quality fine, and honest, and unafraid. " I haven't got a dollar," he had said. It was not an easy, but a very brave thing to say.

" A dollar ! " Dimples scoffed. " Whoever heard of a rabbit being worth a dollar ? I only said that because—well, because I wanted to surprise everybody, I guess. You can have him for thirty-five cents——"

" I—I bid thirty-seven."

" Well, thirty-seven, then—if you want him."

" If you want him ! " Peter held out his arms. The rabbit was in them—the little white, white rabbit with the long wiggly ears.

" You can pay me to-morrow, any old time," Dimples said, backing away.

Peter didn't answer, not one word. She left him standing there, motionless, staring down at the bunny in his arms, the fur a blur of white against his dark coat.

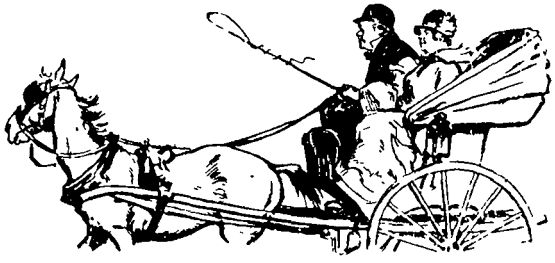
She was smiling as she walked back along Main

Street where the lights were beginning to glimmer in the little stores. She had forgotten the eggs, forgotten everything but the look on Peter McKay's face.

Curiously, though she had no bunny to cuddle up warm and snug, the raw little ache of homesickness had gone. Over in the west the star still twinkled, a friendly little twinkle it seemed to be, " up above the world so high, like a diamond in the sky."

" I wonder," Dimples thought, with her eyes on that star, " if I'm happier because I know that boy is happier. I wonder if that is why those Wise Men took their gifts to the little Jesus—to make Him happy ? "

There was no one to answer, only in the western sky the clear, bright twinkle of the star.



CHAPTER NINE

BUTTERBALL

"Go to it, little chap, sing on!"

ONE Friday afternoon Dimples might have been seen making her way towards the McPherson farm. It was very warm for October, and the sun, through the soft blue haze, was a round red ball. February moved slowly as if under protest.

There was a thoughtful little frown between Dimples' eyes, caused, not by the unexpected warmth or February's slow-moving gait, but by a remembrance of something Mrs. Perry Dawson back home had once told her class of young girls.

"When people are kind to us we should never just take it for granted," she had said, though Dimples had forgotten the exact words, "but we should try in some way to return their kindness. We should never be like a sponge, absorbing, and never giving out unless it is squeezed."

Dimples remembered how fervently she had determined never to be a sponge, never!

" And now," she realized miserably on this sunny afternoon, " I *am* a sponge. The McPhersons are ever so kind to me, and how can I be kind to them ? How ? How ? "

There was no answer from the prairies as they stretched out on either side, out into the blue of the far horizon.

Mrs. McPherson was alone that afternoon.

" The bairns will be sorry to have missed you," she told Dimples, " but they go off once in a while to spend the day with their cousins on their farm ten miles or so up the road. Maybe they'll be back before you leave."

And so for a little while Dimples sat in the kitchen while Mrs. Sandy sewed firm, comprehensive patches into Wee Sandy's little rompers.

It was very quiet in the big kitchen with only the occasional murmur of their voices and the steady tick-tocking of the clock. Without was the silence of the prairies.

" It's sort of—of quiet, isn't it ? " Dimples asked at length.

" Quiet ? " Mrs. Sandy looked up from her sewing. " Quiet ? It's awful, sometimes, that quiet when the bairns aren't around."

The words came suddenly. Her hands fell in her lap. Wee Sandy's rompers slipped unheeded to the floor. She stared across the silence of the room to the girl—the young girl with the wide, wondering eyes.

" Quiet ? " she repeated. " Quiet ? Sometimes I stand and listen and hear—nothing. Nothing ! It's just that, that hearing nothing that's so terrible."

Dimples caught her breath. " Hearing nothing ! " she had said, almost as if she was frightened.

Quite suddenly the girl crossed the room and slipped her arm around the shoulder of Mrs. Sandy McPherson. " But it isn't so—so awfully quiet when the kiddies are here ? "

The tense attitude relaxed. Wee Sandy's mother picked up her sewing. " Oh, it's all right," she said, her voice natural again, " it's quite all right when the bairns come home."

But it was those words that lingered in Dimples' memory, that sang in her ears as she went home. " Quiet—quiet—it's awful, that quiet ! "

Suddenly she jerked February to a standstill. It was but a temporary halt, for after singing out " Hurray, hurray, I'll do it. I won't be a sponge any more—hurray ! " Dimples jerked the rein and urged him on to a more lively trot.

There was no time to carry out her resolve that afternoon, for the early dusk had come down when she reached home, and February, of course, was needed for the " eight-fifteen."

Perhaps she might never have succeeded in carrying it through at all if she had not taken old Pete Chilliby into her confidence. He was rather doubtful at first. " You couldn't take it alone on Feb's back," he objected, then, noticing the disappointment in the grey eyes confronting him, added, " But we'll see, we'll see ! " Suddenly he brought his hand down with a clap on his knee. " We'll do it to-morrow afternoon," he exclaimed. " We'll get mother to go along. I haven't taken mother buggy-riding Saturday afternoon for years."

Mrs. Pete objected at first. Saturday was a busy day, one of the busiest of the whole week. And to go out driving—well, it seemed like a foolish waste of good time.

"You could wear your Sunday hat with the feather," her husband suggested craftily. "It'd seem like old times back east, buggy-driving with you in that hat."

And so it came about that on Saturday afternoon February might have been seen trotting along Main Street with the buggy behind him. But it was not at February or the buggy that the townsfolk stared, stopped, turned and stared again.

Old Pete himself was driving. Pete with the black coat and hat, and heavy gold watch-chain he wore for church, funerals, and special occasions; Mrs. Pete, her plump face placid under the benevolent and soothing influence of the plumed hat. Between them, squeezed in on the edge of the seat, was Dimples Adair, holding something large, unwieldy, and covered, very carefully in her arms.

"Where in the world is that girl going now?" Nora Hill demanded of Helen Jones. "And what's she got in her arms?"

"Goodness only knows!" Helen answered, staring after the buggy. "If she isn't the queerest!"

Perhaps it was a pity they could not have seen her a little later handing that unwieldy covered bundle to Mrs. Sandy McPherson.

"What is it, Dimples, oh, what is it?" Sarah demanded.

"What? What?" Wee Sandy echoed, his voice rising to a squeal of excitement.

It was Butterball, of course. Butterball, a flutter of yellow feathers in his little yellow cage.

"I'm lending him to you," Dimples was explaining, rather breathlessly, "for a week, rent free. You won't mind the quiet so much when Butterball sings."

Mrs. Sandy McPherson put the cage on the table and flung her arms around the young girl. "Oh, my dear," she whispered, "I wish you were my ain bairn."

It was really very jolly after that, for they insisted on making a cup of tea for Mrs. Chilliby, while old Pete was taken out to look over the barn.

Sarah coaxed Dimples out to the steps. "I've something to tell you, something nice," she said, a little undercurrent of excitement very evident in her voice. "Not as nice as him, of course," with a backward jerk of her head she indicated Butterball. "He's the nicest thing that's happened to us, ever."

Dimples smiled. "You're just bubbling over with excitement, Sarah, I can sort of feel it."

Sarah's sober little face seemed to glow. She clasped her hands primly in her lap and swallowed two or three times, impressively. "You know we haven't had a teacher at school since Miss Darrell was sent away for a—a 'mergency operation'?"

Dimples nodded. It was a well-known fact that Miss Darrell, teacher in the little Good-

content school, had been taken suddenly ill a week or so ago, and had been rushed to a city hospital.

"So we've been having holidays," Sarah was saying, "and hoping, sort of, that we'd go on having them all year. Wouldn't it be funny? But there's another teacher coming, and——" the little undercurrent of excitement broke forth jubilantly, "she's to live with us."

"With you, here, on the farm?"

Never, never before, Sarah explained, had a teacher boarded with them. But during the summer still another baby had arrived at the Minchov farm, where the teacher had always boarded, and, though Mrs. Minchov wouldn't have turned Miss Darrell out, when Miss Darrell was taken ill and sent away, Mrs. Minchov had said "No more boarders!"

"She's Russian," Sarah said, her sombre little face lighting up with a smile. "And she says, 'House too small, family too big, no more boarders here!'"

"But why should the teacher come to your farm?"

"We're the next nearest the school. I'm glad, rather. She's going to be nice, I know, for she has the prettiest name, almost as pretty as yours."

"What is it?"

"Miss Denison, Miss Rose Denison."

"Rose Denison!" Dimples repeated. "Oh, isn't it pretty? It makes other names seem—well, sort of plain, doesn't it?"

"Makes mine sound all right. Sarah McPherson—you can't beat that for plainness."

A little later they drove back to Mayfield, all rather silent in the soft blue dusk. Old Pete held the reins in one hand and the whip in the other—an unnecessary precaution, for February never needed the least touching up when his nose was pointed in the general direction of home and oats.

Mrs. Pete indulged in a belated snooze. Dimples, wedged tightly in between them, was smiling as those words rang in her ears—words which had struck straight through to her motherless little heart, " I wish you were my ain bairn ! "

> " I wonder," she wrote in a letter to Mrs. Perry Dawson, after relating the incident, " I wonder if I sowed a seed of kindness in lending Butterball to Mrs. McPherson. You remember that verse you told me—' Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.' I've just been thinking that if I *did* sow a seed of kindness, and reaped Mrs. McPherson's hugs, then I just love sowing good seed."

On Monday morning Sarah and Wee Sandy, taking advantage of their enforced holiday, went off on an errand for their father to another farm. Sandy McPherson and the " hands " were about the work of the day.

In the big farm kitchen Mrs. Sandy was alone. It was very quiet save for the steady tick-tocking of the clock, and the clink of the plates as she did up the breakfast dishes. Without was the silence of the prairies.

Suddenly, cutting across that silence, came the

shrill, sweet notes of song, notes of gladness from the feathered throat of Butterball in the sunny window.

Mrs. Sandy looked up and smiled. " Go to it, little chap ! " she said. " Sing on ! "



CHAPTER TEN

FACING THE INEVITABLE

" It's no use fighting the inevitable. It, and the future, must be faced. And faced bravely too."

ROSE DENISON.

THE prairies ! The prairies ! The prairies ! It seemed to Rose Denison as if the wheels of the train ground out those words in dull, rhythmical repetition. Through the window she could see them stretching out wide and flat to the horizon. The prairies ! The prairies ! The prairies !

Suddenly with a little exclamation of impatience she pulled down the blind, and, leaning back against the green plush seat, closed her eyes as if to shut from sight and mind all reminder of that prairie land.

She felt little curiosity about the village of Goodcontent towards which she was bound ; little interest regarding the work awaiting her there. Rather her thoughts flew back to her life in the big, bustling western city—the life she had loved. Suddenly, cutting in on it all, had come her breakdown and the doctor's verdict, " You

must get out on the prairies for at least six months."

She had stared at him aghast. Had he really uttered those words ? Did he *mean* them ? Get out on the prairies, away from her friends, her work, from her very life, for six months ?

She had gone back then—vividly she remembered—through the busy, downtown streets of the western city to the little flat that she and Anne Henderson called home, had repeated that verdict to her friend. " I asked him if there wasn't enough prairie air in the city, but he said no."

" Then it means giving up this——" the other girl had flung out her hand, indicating the tiny flat, " and your work ? "

Rose Denison had shaken her head. " Not that. He said it would be the best thing if I could go on teaching out there. Oh——" suddenly she had laughed, but it was a harsh, mirthless little sound. " Can you imagine me—*me* in a prairie schoolhouse ? "

But it had, after all, been brought to pass. Even now, over the track that lay so straight and shining across the western prairies, the train was carrying Rose Denison toward the schoolhouse in the little village of Goodcontent.

It was dark when she arrived at Mayfield. Two electric bulbs cast circles of light over the little platform. But beyond these circles was darkness—an inky, impenetrable darkness. Clutching her bag, she half turned as if to step back on to that train, which, in the midst of this strangeness, had become reassuringly familiar. But it was already moving on into the night.

At that moment a voice came out of the shadows —a shy, Scotch, interrogating voice. "Are you Miss Denison? I'm Mrs. Sandy McPherson. This is my husband. You're to live with us."

Then followed a long, long drive, on and on and on, never-ending it seemed, until a few twinkly lights broke the monotony of the darkness. "The village," the shy Scotch voice explained, "we've only another mile to go." At last the car stopped and the owner of the voice opened a gate; it creaked protestingly on its hinges, then clanked behind them.

Inside the farmhouse were large bare rooms, inadequately lighted, and steep stairs, twisting at the top. At the far end of the landing Mrs. Sandy McPherson threw open a door. "Your room," she said, still with that shy, interrogating note in her voice. "Good night."

The room was large, unattractive and unhomelike. Rose Denison gazed around, trying to push back a sudden mental vision of the little flat she had called home—overcrowded, perhaps, and stuffy, but cosy and comfortable.

It was then that she heard it—that shrill, piercing whisper in the hall outside her door. Clearly it carried to her ears. "Sarah, Sarah, I saw her coming upstairs. She's pretty, not a bit like Miss Darrell. Oh, Sarah, she's some peach!"

Because she was young and very, very human Rose Denison smiled at that. For there is, after all, something curiously comforting, something very stimulating, in being called "some peach" in a tone of voice so convincing in its finality.

Those first few days before her work began

were lonely and strange for the girl. Lonely in the farmhouse where Mrs. Sandy's natural Scotch reserve blocked any friendly overtures. Lonely outside where the silence of the prairies seemed to press down and hem her in. On the second day she walked to the railroad track—a gleaming ribbon of steel, catching the rays of the afternoon sun. At half-past three the east-bound train went by, thundering—disdainfully it seemed—past the village of Goodcontent. East-bound! Rose Denison watched it receding—smaller, smaller—until it became at last a mere black speck in the distance.

She turned from that railroad track to the village where the tall grain elevator towered so importantly above those unimportant little buildings lying almost in its shadow—schoolhouse, post office and tiny church.

"I'm going to hate it," she told herself. "I'll never get well here, never, because I'll hate it, hate it——"

It was at that moment that she met Dimples Adair.

Dimples, in fact, was on her way over to the farm to see the new teacher. Meeting her thus unexpectedly she recognized her immediately and jerked February to a standstill.

"I just know you're Miss Denison, the new teacher," she said, not as if asking a question, but rather stating a fact. "And have you been down to the railroad track watching the train go home?"

The older girl smiled up into the serious grey eyes. "How did you ever guess?"

Dimples slid down off February. "Because I

used to do it too when I first came. It's awful, isn't it, that feeling ? "

" Awful ! " the little school-teacher agreed with scant regard for academic vocabulary.

" It gets better after awhile," Dimples was reassuring her. " I can watch that train now and not feel a bit queer inside. At first I wanted to put my head down on the track and let the train cut it right off."

The little school-teacher laughed. " I'm not willing to go as far as all that," she said. " I just wanted to run after it and jump on to get away from this——" With a wave of her hand she indicated the tiny schoolhouse across the road.

" Perhaps," Dimples suggested, a little doubtfully, " perhaps you'll like it."

" Perhaps," the little school-teacher agreed, " perhaps, my dear, I shall ! " And smiled at the young girl with the doubt still lingering in her mind.

Several things had their part during those first days in replacing that raw homesickness in the heart of the little teacher. There was the kindness of Mrs. Sandy, her attempts at shy friendliness ; there was Dimples Adair who, after that first encounter, trotted over several times as if trying to encourage the stranger.

And there was Wee Sandy.

He approached her shyly as she sat on the steps in the sun on the afternoon before school was to begin. " School's starting to-morrow," he stated tentatively. " Me'n Sarah've been telling the kids about you."

" Oh ? "

" We've told 'em you're the prettiest teacher we've ever had."

Rose Denison gave a start and then laughed outright.

" The prettiest we ever had," he repeated, then slipped his grubby little hand into hers, coaxingly it seemed. " Would you like to come and see Soc ? "

" Soc ? "

He nodded. " Soc's my pig, my very, very own. He's a little pink, pink pig, though he's getting bigger all the time. He's never going to grow up and be killed into bacon, never."

It was over Socrates, the pig, that the friendship ripened. It was so easy to reach the heart of Wee Sandy by admiring that pig. And it *was* little and pink and curly-tailed. " Just a darling ! " Rose Denison said.

Sandy grinned. " I just knew you'd like pigs ! " he said.

Sarah and Wee Sandy accompanied her to school on her first morning, and it was Wee Sandy who explained why the group were waiting in front of the little school. " They all wanted to see you first," he said, with a little giggle of amusement, " so they all came early and they all got stung."

They were mostly Russian-Poles, with queer-sounding, unfamiliar names, a little group gathered in this prairie schoolhouse to learn together the lessons of the new land.

They rather frightened the new teacher at first, these serious, stolid, little people with the names so difficult to pronounce, so hard to

remember—Stopan, Christo, Antan, Olga, Sabena. There was shy friendliness in most of the black eyes confronting her ; a veiled hostility in a few—she was quick to recognize that—an eager curiosity in all.

" Who do you like best ? " Sarah wanted to know as they walked home with her that first afternoon, adding complacently, " not counting Wee Sandy or me, of course."

Rose Denison smiled at the direct question. " I don't even know them apart yet."

" They all like you," Sarah assured her, " though Ivan says you won't be no good of a teacher, he says you won't be able to tell *him* anything."

" Oh ! And is Ivan that big, stocky boy who chews gum ? "

Sarah nodded. " Ivan Minchov. Miss Darrell called him a—a problem."

Rose Denison felt tired and discouraged when she went up to her own room a little later, carrying with her those words Sarah had repeated, " Ivan says you'll be no good of a teacher."

" Perhaps he's right," the girl thought, miserably. " I don't feel as if I *could* teach here."

A vivid contrast rose in her mind—her classroom at home, with the children alert, interested, friendly. The children here as they had appeared to-day—stolid, heavy, a little undercurrent of hostility making itself felt.

She opened the window and the clear, crisp, prairie air swept in. Those other words of Sarah's seemed to come with it, " They all like you ! "

Very suddenly the girl threw back her head

with a gesture that was characteristic. "Buck up!" she said abruptly, as though she was addressing some one else. "You're here. You've got to stay. It's no use fighting the inevitable. It, and the future, must be faced, and faced bravely too. It's up to you, Rose Denison, my dear!"



CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE STORY HOUR

" The sun, the moon, the stars, the seas, the hills and the plains
Are not these, O Soul, the vision of Him who reigns ? "
TENNYSON.

IT was Ivan Minchov who received a distinct shock on the new teacher's second morning in Goodcontent school.

Ivan had already settled it in his slow-moving mind that she was " no good of a teacher " ; that a little bit of a thing like her would be scared of a chap his size, which reasoning all promised a term devoid of work, and quite to the liking of lazy, shiftless Ivan Minchov.

But, curiously enough, it was Ivan to whom the new teacher directed a question in the very first lesson. Ivan, usually successful in his policy of " dodging," realized that there was no evading this, and, releasing his wad of gum from its hiding-place in his cheek, took refuge in a sheepish grin and a " Aw, I dunno ! "

" When I ask you a question," the new teacher

said, very distinctly, " you stand up to answer. You address me by name. And you do not chew gum. Go to the door and throw it out."

To his surprise Ivan found himself at the door about to part with his long-cherished wad of gum. A sudden mental alertness caused him to slip it instead into his pocket.

" I said," the clear voice reminded him, " to throw it out."

Sheer surprise struck Ivan into unresisting obedience.

" Now," the new teacher said, when Ivan took his seat, " we'll start again," and she repeated the question.

Ivan sat stock still.

" Stand up ! "

The abrupt command jerked Ivan to his feet.

" If you have nothing to say but ' I don't know, Miss Denison,' stand up and say it. But you'll come back to-morrow prepared to answer this question. Do you understand, Ivan ? "

" Uh-huh ! "

" I beg your pardon."

" Yes, Miss Denison."

There was an appreciative little giggle in the room, for it was, after all, only yesterday afternoon that Ivan Minchov had boasted that the new teacher couldn't tell him anything. And now, they all realized, she was telling him a good deal.

But even that appreciative little titter was strangled before it found utterance, for it struck in simultaneously on those receptive young brains that this new teacher—as some one put it—" would stand nothin' from nobody ! "

But there were other things they were quick to discover about her too—unexpected, delightful things. She could tell stories, and she *would* tell them twice a week in the afternoons if their lessons were finished and well done. It was on these occasions that Ivan Minchov proved a stumbling-block for the class, for Ivan was quite determined to prove that nobody could make him hurry if he didn't want to, least of all this decided, little teacher.

But the combined efforts of the class were successful in moving Ivan—much against his will.

" Don't be such a slow-coach ! " Simon Popoff said.

" Get a wiggle on ! " Antan suited his words to action and gave Ivan a vigorous prod in the ribs.

" 'Cause we want them stories," Nickola added.

Simon, Antan and Nickola, known as the Popoff triplets, were as alike as the proverbial peas. Rarely was one seen without the other. If Simon, by painstaking effort, rose near the top of the class, Antan and Nickola miraculously rose too. If Antan, lured by something inside Farmer Brown's yard, wriggled his fat little self under the fence, Simon and Nickola wriggled after. If Nickola, a little fleeter of foot than the others, triumphantly led the rush of children to a fire, Simon and Antan breathlessly brought up the rear.

And before the eyes of the Popoff triplets Rose Denison's stories opened a gateway of romance. " 'Tisn't fair when we hurry and you won't, that we can't have the stories," they pointed out indignantly to Ivan Minchov.

Sometimes on a Friday afternoon Dimples would canter over to Goodcontent to find school still in progress and the schoolhouse crowded to the doors, small brothers and sisters being brought along to sit wondering-eyed through stories of "ships that do business in great waters"; of far-off foreign ports; of the land of the midnight sun—romantic tales they were, told in the land of prairie and of plain.

There was interest, too, in the stories Rose Denison picked from pages of history, stories that held their interest because, as the new teacher put it, "These great men and women were little boys and girls once, just like you."

The inference was plain. "Us"—Nickola put the thought of all into words—"us'll be great men some day too."

Of explorers she told them, even wrote the words of one of Henry Hudson's men on the blackboard for them to memorize. "He was speaking of the United States," she explained, "which was a vast undiscovered country at that time, but his words apply just as well to our own country: 'This is a very good land to fall in with, and a pleasant land to see.'"

There were stories of famous inventors and pioneers, Watt and George Stephenson, the father of railways. "I'd like to be that kind of a father when I grow up," Wee Sandy said, rather wistfully, "not just the father of a little boy, but of things like railways'n ships'n fire-engines."

And under her skilful guidance the skies above them opened into a blaze of glory and speculation. They even stayed for tea one memorable night in

the little schoolhouse so that she could explain those lessons in the sky itself.

" 'Fore you came," Wee Sandy told her shyly, " we thought God hung 'em out in the sky when it got dark, but it's great to know that they may be other worlds like ours with boys on 'em—nice little boys like me."

Dimples Adair was as fascinated by those stories as were the children themselves. " Keep them as late as you can," she pleaded with Rose Denison, " so that I can get there in time. Oh, I do love hearing them, and you tell them as if you loved them, too."

Rose Denison smiled. " I do," she said, " but there is something else I'm learning to love—my little new Canadians ! "

And then the Rev. David Grant heard about those stories. David Grant, in addition to his church in Mayfield, had service on Sunday afternoons in Goodcontent. And so he came to ask Rose Denison to tell Bible stories to the children in his church.

At first she shook her head and said no, most decidedly, but, as all his parishioners knew, there was something quite irresistible about David Grant, and Rose Denison, rather to her own surprise, finally said yes.

And so she carried that gift of hers into Sunday school until, out of the past, names which had been but names, insignificant and unreal to those boys and girls, flamed into personalities living and vital. They went home that first Sunday afternoon rolling them zestfully under their tongues—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

Oh, it was sheer pluck and determination which had carried Rose Denison through those first trying days. Determination to face the future bravely. There had been moments when, confronted by the heavy hostility of Ivan Minchov, she had felt an almost overwhelming sense of despair. But other moments had gradually thrust themselves in, moments when the Popoff triplets, sitting spellbound and motionless under the spell of stories, begged at five o'clock, " G'wan, oh g'wan, don't stop yet ! "

And just as slowly and surely as it had crept into the affection of Dimples Adair, the beauty of the new land was weaving its spell around Rose Denison. There was beauty, she realized, in the brilliance of those starlit nights, as the old, old words answered her thoughts, " The heavens declare the glory of God." There was beauty, too, in the crisp air of the early mornings ; in the blue on the far horizon ; in the strong, health-giving prairie sunshine that flooded the plains. She even tried to express it one evening to silent, unresponsive Sandy McPherson as she stood at the bottom of the farm steps and looked over toward the west—aflame with the setting sun. " It's very beautiful," she spoke softly, " this western land of ours."

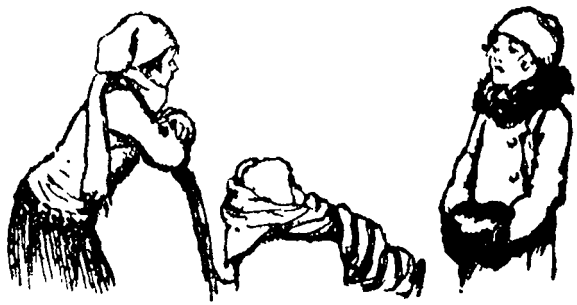
Sandy McPherson stared at her. Then he removed his long-stemmed pipe and shook his head doubtfully. " Oh, I dunno ! " he said.

That was, she had come to recognize, his almost universal exclamation, called upon to fit all occasions, just a vague, indeterminate shake of his head, and " I dunno ! "

" Perhaps," Rose said, withdrawing her eyes from the flaming sky, and smiling across at him, " perhaps you see so many marvellous sunsets that you get used to them."

" I dunno," Sandy said, adding, " I dunno's I've noticed 'em particularly."

Rose Denison was still smiling as she turned to go in. " Perhaps he hasn't," she thought, " but I have. Oh, I'm learning to love it all—the rugged beauty of this western land."



CHAPTER TWELVE

YOUTHFUL POETS

DIMPLES was very indignant. Her cheeks were quite pink, and her eyes snapped as she faced Opal Flinders defiantly across the twins' carriage that afternoon on Main Street. "She's a perfectly wonderful teacher!" Dimples was declaring, "Wonderful!"

Opal shook an equally positive head. "She can't be, or she wouldn't be teaching in a little school like that. And, anyhow, I don't like anyone named Rose."

"Well," Dimples retorted, "nobody asked you to."

It was only a temporary tiff, of course, caused by a little lurking sense of jealousy in the heart of Opal Flinders, which had had its birth when Dimples had told her about the new schoolteacher. "She has the loveliest hair and the most beautiful eyes, and is so little and pretty—oh, I just love her!" she had said. And Opal had gone

home to gaze disconsolately at her own reflection. "No one could call my hair lovely or my eyes beautiful—no one could ever love me like that!" she had realized, winking back a bitter little tear.

And so she had decided that she would never like this Miss Rose Denison—not one little bit, and as a consequence was snappy and cross when Dimples mentioned her.

But Dimples was equally determined that Opal should like her, and accordingly, after much persuasion, Dimples and Opal sallied forth one afternoon, both on the back of February.

They slipped into the back of the little school, just as Rose Denison was about to tell the last story for the day. "It's for the very little kiddies," she was saying; "any of you older ones may leave now."

But none of them left, not one. They all sat, as did Dimples and Opal, quite motionless through the story of the Little White Kitten. The voice of Rose Denison fell clearly in the quiet room:—

> "The Little White Kitten was gazing wistfully after his sturdy brown relations who seemed to fight shy of their little white cousin. And he did so want to play, to have a good time with them all. Then his wise old mother gave him a piece of advice, 'Never mind what they are doing, pretend you are having a good time yourself. You don't want to chase their tails. Your own is as good, or better.'
>
> "And so the Little White Kitten started to chase his own tail, around and around,

frisking this way and that, and having the loveliest time, so that the brown cousins stopped playing to watch him. 'Let's get him to play with us,' they said, one to the other. And so they asked, timidly, 'May we play with you?' And he flicked his baby-whiskers and said, 'I wouldn't have you chasing my nice white tail for anything. Go and chase your own!'

"And he went on chasing his nice white tail.

"Then his mother gave him another piece of advice. 'You'll never be quite happy when you are thinking only about yourself. You are old enough to take re-spon-si-bil-ity.'

"The Little White Kitten trembled at the sound of the long word, but said, 'Yes, mother.'

"'There is a relation of yours down there,' she nodded towards No-mouse Alley—where, as he knew, dogs were many and mice were few—'who is half starved. Bring him up and share your saucer of milk.'

"The Little White Kitten thought it sounded a funny way to make himself happy, but he scampered obediently down to No-mouse Alley.

"He found the poor cousin at once—the scrubbiest little tabby you could ever hope to see. 'Come and have some milk,' he invited, and the little Tabby said, 'Just give me a chance!'

"So they ran back and the Little White

Kitten, watching the other drink, felt happier than he had ever felt before.

" And then the cousins came over again. ' Do let us be friends,' they begged.

" The Little White Kitten stroked his whiskers thoughtfully. ' Go and find me a dead mouse,' he said.

" And so they brought him a nice plump mouse. Picking it up, he gave it to the half-starved Tabby. ' What are you doing that for ? ' the brown cousins asked. ' We brought it for you.'

" ' I don't need it,' he said, ' and he does.'

" ' I wonder,' one of the cousins remarked, ' if that is why our white cousin is so happy—because he is trying to help someone else.'

" The Little White Kitten looked across at his wise old mother, and winked.

" ' I told you so ! ' she winked back."

" Oh ! " Opal leaned over and whispered to Dimples, " Wasn't that lovely ? D'you suppose she'd let me bring the twins sometime ? "

Dimples looked a little doubtful. " They're only babies," she said. " They wouldn't understand stories."

Opal looked rather offended. " Oh, yes, they would. They're very understandable, our twins."

But the charm of the little school-teacher cast its spell around Opal. " She *is* sweet," she admitted, as they jogged home on February's back. " I kind of hope the twins'll grow up like her, or, at least——" Opal politely divided the honours, " one like her and one like you."

There was snow on the prairies now, a-sparkle in the sunlight, or under the moon at night. And there was a feeling of Christmas in the air, too—Christmas in Mayfield, with the little shop windows aflame with streamers and trimmings of red; Christmas in school with examinations, the class party, and holidays looming so near.

It was Dimples who discovered that Opal was secretly miserable over the approaching holiday season. Opal, in fact, admitted it one afternoon as she hurried the twins home out of the cold north wind. "I hate Christmas!" she said.

"Hate Christmas?" Dimples repeated, really shocked. "Hate *Christmas?* Oh, Opal—why?"

"I don't like it a bit. Folks are always kind to us. 'Tisn't that. It's because we can't be kind to them. It's no fun, all gettin' and no givin', and maw says there isn't enough money to do any givin' this year either. It's 'cause of the twins. Maw says twins are the most 'xpensive kind of babies to have. There's no money left over for lux'ries when you get through with them, maw says. There won't be any money left even for Christmas cards, and I wanted to send you one." Opal choked a little over her disappointment.

"Oh, don't worry about me," Dimples said, reassuringly. "But I say, why don't you make 'em?"

"Make what?"

"Christmas cards. Out of paper. And then paint a picture on them and write some poetry about Christmas bells and things."

"Me—paint pictures—write poetry——"

" I'll help you. We'll do it together. It'll be heaps of fun. We've only got to *think*."

It *was* fun, there was no doubt about that, though some of their combined efforts met with discouragement at first. A painting in Dimples' most finished style, and produced with colours from her best paint-box, displayed triumphantly to Peter McKay, met with scornful ridicule.

" What're you doing with a garbage man with an ash-can over his shoulder, on Christmas cards ? " he shouted. " Oh-ho-ho ! "

If scorn could kill, Peter would have been annihilated on the spot. " Oh ! " Dimples gasped. " Oh-h ! That's Santa Claus with his sack ! Garbage man ! Ash-can ! Oh, you—you ***horrid*** boy ! "

" Perhaps," she confessed to Opal a little later, " perhaps we had better say farewell to art, and try poetry. I thought of a beautiful verse—listen—

> " Merry Christmas ! Merry Christmas !
> So the Christmas bells do ring.
> Merry Christmas ! Merry Christmas !
> Hark the herald Angels sing."

" The last line is from the hymn-book," Dimples confessed, " but the folks that made up the hymn-book won't mind, they may even feel rather honoured to have it used on a Christmas card."

" I think you're wonderful," Opal said slowly. " You sing, you play the piano—at least you would if you had one. You paint pictures and make up poetry. You do—oh, just everything ! "

"Oh, not everything!" Dimples protested, hoping that she sounded modest.

They worked together in the Flinders' little shack one day after school.

"We'll be better there than at Mrs. Smithers," Dimples said. "She says poetry's silly, that you might's well say right out what you mean instead of trying to make it rhyme. She'd squash the poetry out of anyone, she would!"

It was cold and cheerless in the Flinders' house that afternoon, despite the heat from the big stove in the corner of the room. Dimples, heated perhaps by the inward glow of creative ambition, seemed quite unaware of the cold, though Opal blew on her thin little fingers, wriggled her toes, and placed one foot over the other in a vain search after the comfort of warmth.

She gazed wistfully across at Dimples as she sat there on the other side of the table, puckering her forehead, sucking her pencil, and then scribbling at top speed. If only, little Opal Flinders thought, if only a fairy godmother would turn her into a girl like that—a girl with curly hair, eyes like stars and cheeks with dimples in them. A girl who had money, money to buy things when she was hungry, big, fat currant buns, a dozen at a time—a little flush ran up into Opal's thin cheek at the audacity of the thought—a whole dozen at a time, or a cake with icing on it, pink over the top and down the sides, with lemon filling in the middle——

Then, with a little shiver, Opal relinquished that day-dream and came back to the stark reality of the present—a bunless, cakeless present.

"Poetry doesn't always turn out the way you

expect it to," Dimples said, rather ruefully, a little later. " The rhyme often sort of spoils the meaning. These all sound rather sad, and this one would only do for a miser——"

" Then we'll send it to the hermit, the carpenter on Main Street, you know. They say he's got heaps of money hidden away somewhere, and yet he just goes on being a carpenter."

" Then this'll do fine—listen—

" ' Be not a miser any more,
But give your gold before you soar.' "

" Before you soar ? " Opal repeated, puzzled.

" Soar up to heaven, you know. It's pretty, isn't it ? "

" Lovely ! I wasn't going to send him one, of course, but it's a shame not to send one that fits like that."

" This," Dimples explained, " is about being kind. I thought it might do for Uncle Gus—

" ' This Christmas sure may be your last,
Be kind to all before 'tis past.' "

" Oh, don't send it to your uncle ! Let's send it to Mrs. Thatcher of the cake shop," Opal pleaded, her thoughts flying to the pink-icinged cake of the day-dream. " A woman who sells cakes *ought* to be kind."

" All right, I don't care particularly." She picked up another. " I made this up especially for Mr. Chilliby. He's getting pretty old, you know—

" ' Your life is nearly done, 'tis true,
The pearly gates will soon ope for you.' "

" And this one," Dimples gave her curls a triumphant shake, " is for Mrs. Smithers—

" ' Be extra generous, kind, and brave,
Before you step into your grave.' "

" They're wonderful ! " Opal exclaimed, " and they all make you feel so lovely and sad, don't they ? "

" Poetry *should* make you feel like that. Miss Rutherford said that Tennyson wrote that lovely ' In Memoriam ' in memory of a friend of his. Our poetry is sort of like that too, only, of course, the folks it's about aren't dead yet."

" I was trying to make up one for you," Opal said, despairingly, " but I can't think of a thing to rhyme with Dimples except pimples, and that wouldn't sound nice on a Christmas card."

" Well, some folks can make up poetry and some folks can't. I've just been wondering this afternoon whether I may be a budding Shakespeare." Dimples pulled her hat over her curls and slipped into her coat. " But even if I do turn out to be a poet and you don't, you'll always have something I haven't."



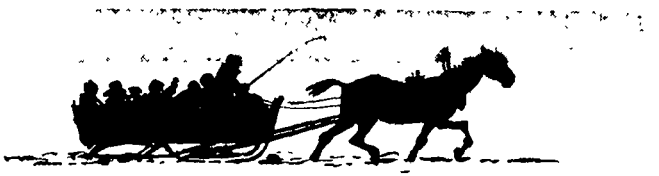
Opal's eyes were two round questions.

" Darling little twin sisters ! "

The questions twinkled into a smile. " Oh, *them !* " Opal said.

She watched Dimples run down the steps and walk along the street until the corner hid her from view. How was it, she wondered, that Dimples Adair always thought of such nice things to say, such lovely things. " Something I haven't—darling little twin sisters ! "

" That's what you are, yourself," Opal assured the now invisible Dimples, " just a darling—that's what ! "



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

CHRISTMAS—PEACE, GOODWILL AND HAPPINESS

CHRISTMAS! The thought brought homesick memories to Dimples Adair as she turned February on to the Lone Wolf Trail toward the village of Goodcontent that particular afternoon in mid-December. There was no sun, and the clouds, hanging low and grey over the prairies, seemed to accord with her mood as she let her thoughts run back to other Christmas seasons—gay and festive seasons among the snow-covered Caledon hills in old Ontario. In spite of the vividness of those memories it seemed to Dimples a long time since last Christmas when she had prepared for the holidays, little thinking of the drastic changes which lay ahead in the new year.

There was a little lump in her throat as those memories swept back. "I wonder if Uncle Gus is ever homesick or lonely," she thought, then quite suddenly she laughed outright—a laugh that rang curiously clear amid the surrounding silences. She jerked February to a more nimble trot. "Anyhow," she assured herself with characteristic vigour, "it's no use feeling sorry for myself. It

only makes me homesicker than ever. Hurry up, Feb., I know Miss Denison will cheer me up."

Rose Denison was glad to see Dimples, there was no doubt about that. "I've just been longing for some one to talk to," she said, looking rather tired and discouraged as she sat down at one of the desks. "Oh, I wish I could do more for these kiddies of mine!"

"I think you do a good deal."

Rose Denison shook her head. "Education means so much to them, everything. One soon sees that. It opens such great doors of opportunities before them. But it's a big task, and I feel so incapable of it all."

"You, incapable!" Dimples, perched on one of the desks, laughed at the absurdity of the idea. "I simply can't imagine you being incapable of anything."

"I feel it anyway. Just now I'm worrying about Christmas. I'd like to have a party here for the kiddies. I happened to wish it out loud, and little Stopan Minchov gasped, 'A party?' he said, 'A party for us kids?' Then he laughed. The idea seemed so surprising as to be funny. Poor little lad! And they all do love to hear about the shepherds abiding in the fields, and about the wise men following the star."

Dimples was very thoughtful as she trotted February home that afternoon. "You don't catch Miss Denison thinking how lonely *she's* feeling," she was accusing herself, "she's thinking about those kiddies, and what she can do for them. She sounded so sorry for little Stopan Minchov."

It was at that moment that the idea came. Oh,

ideas come very suddenly sometimes when they form themselves in a fertile young brain.

"Why not?" she demanded of the spaces around her, "Why not? I'll do it. I will. The others'll think I'm crazy, but I don't care. They can only say no."

There were plans afoot among Dimples' classmates for a Christmas party, and now that the holiday week was drawing so near excitement was running high.

"You'll come, of course?" Nora Hill had asked Dimples. "We're to have a Christmas tree and all sorts of fun."

It was this remark, lingering in Dimples' memory, which was really responsible for the idea, "A Christmas tree and all sorts of fun!" And that other remark which Rose Denison had repeated, "A party for us kids!"

"I'll do it!" Dimples repeated, in the light of those remembered words. "Get on there, Feb., I'll do it to-morrow in the morning, before I lose my courage."

And so to-morrow in the morning, with permission of Miss Rutherford, Dimples stood up in front of her class and presented the idea.

At first, surprised by her own daring, she stumbled a little over the words. But gradually she forgot her nervousness, forgot everything but the importance of her proposal. Oh, a Dimples was speaking now who had seldom shown herself in Mayfield. A Dimples, persuasive, compelling, irresistible.

The members of the class stared at her in amazement. Was this girl really suggesting that

they give away their class party to another school?

At the end of her appeal she put it very concisely, "What I want us to do is to take our Christmas tree and party out to those kiddies in that other school in the little village of Goodcontent."

There was silence, broken by Helen remarking in a loud whisper to Nora Hill, "Of all the cheek!"

And then Peter McKay of the twinkly blue eyes stood up and said he thought it'd be a nice thing to do.

And Bob Harris said he thought so too.

"Well, I don't!" It was Nora Hill, sharply decisive. "It's a crazy idea!"

"Of course it is!" Sally Maguire agreed. "Crazy!"

"It's not!" Dimples retorted, her cheeks blazing. "And you wouldn't say so either if you'd seen those little kids, or if you'd heard that one asking, 'A party for us kids?'"

Peter McKay sprang to his feet, "Let's give 'em one!"

"Everybody," Dimples called out clearly, challengingly, "everybody who wants to do it—yell, 'Let's!'"

Of course, with the boys leading off with such a vigorous shout, everybody yelled, they couldn't help it. And if anyone didn't join in, they just weren't noticed.

With an enthusiastic start like that there was no lack of enthusiasm in carrying it through. It was such fun, too, telling the folks at home about it all;

buying the presents and trimmings for the tree. " For it's got to be the sparklingest and swellest tree that ever was ! " They all agreed on that.

As a matter of fact, when the selected committee met to do the buying the whole class turned up, too. " Because," as one non-committee member put it, " it's our money we're spending."

The enthusiasm spread. The women of the church, never lagging behind in well-doing, planned a supper for that party, and the smell of spiced cakes and mince-pies was abroad in the land. And old Pete Chilliby came forward with an offer of February and the big open sleigh to drive everything and everybody out to Goodcontent.

Oh, it was the Christmas spirit of peace and goodwill and happiness, and almost forgotten in the general excitement was the young girl whose idea it had been, the young girl, who, in planning for others, was losing much of the loneliness in her own heart.

On the day before Christmas the boys and girls were literally prancing with excitement—stowing those delightfully mysterious, knobby parcels into the big open sleigh behind February ; tucking themselves in ; receiving the fragile parcels of pies and cakes which must be held so carefully ; and, last, but not least, taking in on top of all the fragrant, green little tree.

And then, after the drive and the arrival in Goodcontent, came the decorating of that tree. Surely was a tree never so decorated before, until it quivered and shook, and sparkled and shone, under the little silver star on its topmost branch.

Rose Denison, who had been told by Dimples about the surprise, arrived with her pupils when it was all ready. And then, of course, the real fun began. It just couldn't help but be fun with that feeling in the air of excitement, and laughter, and cheer; with the wide-eyed astonishment of the little new Canadians, and their cries of delight on receiving their parcels. And when the tree was stripped of all but its trimmings, there were games until supper was ready. It was then—when the laden tables seemed almost to sag under the weight of good things to eat, and the little silver star still twinkled from the topmost branch of the tree—that Rose Denison read to them of the 'shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night"; of the Angel's message, "I bring you good tidings of great joy . . . unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

Oh, the old, old words fell very clearly upon the ears of those boys and girls in that little Good-content school.

The supper was everything it promised to be, with "Enough to go round, and then some!" as Peter McKay put it.

"Um-mm," some one agreed, "the scrummiest bun-feed!"

Dimples smiled as she watched Rose Denison. Her cheeks were so rosy and her eyes so bright. Oh, the fun of that party was finding a ready response and echo in the sympathetic heart of the little school-teacher.

And so they played and sang and made merry together—those young Canadians who had first

seen the light on the Manitoba prairie, and those others, who, having come across the seas, were learning to call Canada their home.

And when it was all over, when fur-clad daddies had come to take the wee folk home, Ivan Minchov paused in front of Rose Denison. " We never had nothin' like this before," he told her, his words coming slowly, stumblingly almost, and added, so surprising the little school-teacher that she could only gasp in answer, " I guess school's all right when you're the teacher, Miss Denison."

A little later and they were driving home, all the young folk from Mayfield, over the rolling prairies, under the " millions and millions of stars."

Dimples leaned her head back against the hard board. Above the voices of the boys and girls came the cheerful jingle of February's sleigh-bells, the clip-clop of his hoofs on the hard snow. Up in front of the sleigh bulked the fur-clad figure of old Pete Chilliby. Past him, past February's keen, home-pointing nose, far in the distance as yet, twinkled the lights of Mayfield.

Somehow at that moment all that Dimples held dear seemed very, very close ; seemed to fold around her, making her feel safe, secure, and happy—the memory of home ; the promise of this new life ; the voices of those children as they had reluctantly left the party, " Thanks ever'n ever so much ! " The words Rose Denison had read to them, the old, old words of the shepherds abiding in the field keeping watch over their flocks by night. Even the birth of the little Jesus seemed near and real, though hundreds upon hundreds of years had come between that night of tidings of

great joy, and this night of starlit beauty on the wide-flung Canadian prairie.

On a sudden impulse Dimples' voice rang out, the others joining in the well-known and much-loved words—

"'O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie.'"

Clear and sweet the young voices rose under the stars—

"'We hear the Christmas angels,
The great, glad tidings tell,
O come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Emmanuel.'"



CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"OLD DAME WINTER"

" Up above in clouded sky,
Old Dame Winter, with a sigh,
Said, ' My pillow I must shake,'
Thus was born the first snow-flake."

CLARE BERNHARDT.

WINTER had come to the west—winter with storm-winds and blizzards, with snow that blanketed the prairies far and wide, that blocked the roads and sometimes stopped the trains. Winter that brought, too, sunshine and blue sky, and the clear, magical radiance of the skies at night.

The road to Goodcontent was snow-blocked, at times impassable. As a consequence February spent long afternoons of drowsy content in the old shed behind the King George, only trotting forth on those mornings when Mother Chilliby went shopping, and in the evenings to meet the eight-fifteen, with the merry jingle of sleigh bells that old Pete loved to hear.

Winter had come down, too, over the tiny

village of Goodcontent. " If we have much more snow," the little teacher remarked out of the depths of a fur collar as she was being driven to school one morning, " we'll see nothing of our village except the grain elevator."

From his snug nest of rugs in the bottom of the sleigh, Wee Sandy answered her proudly : " It'd have to snow for ever, I guess, to cover that elevator of ours."

They were difficult days for the little school-teacher, testing her pluck and endurance—the early morning walk or drive to school, lighting the fire and setting all in order with fingers that were stiff and numb, trying to teach on a stormy morning, with perhaps only four or five pupils, while her thoughts played truant and ran back to the schoolroom in the big city—steam-heated and comfortable on cold winter mornings. There friendly evenings had followed the day—cosy, companionable evenings in the little flat, or at a lecture or concert. Here the evenings were long. " Never-ending," Rose Denison thought, glad to exchange the blaring jazz of the radio for the quiet of her own room. She wrote of it to Anne Henderson :

> " Sandy McPherson, for some reason or other, seems to enjoy jazz over the radio. Perhaps it's a welcome change from the quietness of the prairies. That quietness, though, is something I'm learning rather to enjoy. There is something rather fascinating about it. To-night it is not quiet at all, for a storm is sweeping around us. It's frighten-

ing, almost. My room is cold, and I'm wrapped in a woolly kimona and blanket, and have a nice, smug, safe sort of feeling as I listen to the shriek of the wind. Do you remember how some one put it?

"'Here in my room I'm as snugly shut,
As a glad little worm in the heart of a nut.'"

David Grant's little car, which rattled around so gaily, was jacked up for the winter, and on Sundays, when the road was passable at all, he drove out to Goodcontent in the sleigh behind old February. Often, though, even February was not equal to that drive, and David Grant was forced to take the train. Twice during the winter even the train failed. "I'll be glad," he said, eyeing his little jacked-up car regretfully, "I'll be glad when spring comes again!"

Winter had enveloped Mayfield too. Main Street presented a bleak, desolate appearance. The store windows were frosted blanks, and the King George, without its gay boxes of flowers, stood forth bleak and weather-beaten.

The cold north wind howled around and through the Flinders' shack on Shannon Street, and Opal's thin little face had a pinched and hungry look. "I wish we wouldn't have such cold winters until the twins grow up," she complained, trying to warm Ruby's cold little fingers in her own.

Dimples Adair found something rather likeable about those winter days in Mayfield, something stimulating in the boisterous buffeting of the wind,

something jovial in the blaze of the sun after a storm-swept day.

> "I even like the mornings when the thermometer is away below zero," she wrote to her uncle. "I was hurrying to school yesterday and it was so cold that my face felt stiff and queer, and then I met Big Bill, the policeman, and he said, 'Excuse me, miss, but your nose is nipped.' Frozen, he meant, just the tip. So we rubbed snow on it, Big Bill helped. It seemed the funniest thing having a great big policeman trying to thaw out my nose, right on Main Street too."

There was still a little sense of loneliness and isolation among her classmates in school, due perhaps to the lurking current of jealousy which still persisted.

Peter McKay had wisely accepted the inevitable, had even tried to be gallant about it. "I don't mind being second and letting you come out first!" he told Dimples.

"Letting me!" Dimples gasped. "Oh, Peter McKay, I'd like to see you stop me!"

But Helen Jones was not at all willing to accept the supremacy of Dimples Adair. There were plans afoot for the annual Sunday school concert, and it was about this forthcoming event that Helen was talking to Nora Hill one afternoon. "I have a sort of feeling that Dimples Adair thinks she can sing," she said. "If she can, I hope she won't let on, or that no one'll find out before the concert. I don't want her butting in!"

Peter, overhearing the last remark, grinned

derisively. " Oh no, you don't want her butting in, you want to be the high muck-a-muck yourself, don't you ? "

" I'll high muck-a-muck you, if you don't watch out ! " Helen retorted, without any very clear idea as to the meaning of the term, but liking the threatening sound of it.

Perhaps Dimples sensed a little of this attitude of Helen Jones, for it was on this very subject that she wrote to Mrs. Perry Dawson—

> " I've had no chance to sing here, except in church, and then Mrs. Smithers drowns me out. I do miss it so, and envy Butterball because he can sing whenever he wants to. Folks'd think I was ever so queer if I burst out suddenly like he does."

But Butterball was also quick to show his disapproval of the chilly atmosphere. He hunched himself on his perch, a ball of ruffled yellow feathers, and maintained a sulky silence. Only when the door opened and Dimples appeared would he give his feathers a little preparatory shake and burst into sudden song—a glad, trilling song of welcome.



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

"A DREAM OF MINE"

" A dream of mine flew over the mead . . .
. . . And it drew me on to follow its lead."

THOMAS HARDY.

THERE was nothing about that particular January afternoon to mark it out from other afternoons, nothing to indicate that in later years Dimples Adair was to look back and know that it marked an epoch in her life.

She was really feeling rather cross when Mrs. Smithers sent her with a message to the carpenter on Main Street. There was a low, grey sky overhead, and a cold wind blowing that seemed to strike, as Dimples put it, through to her very bones.

She walked part of the way with Opal, who, hurrying the twins home out of the wind, was rather breathless with her exertions. " Both of 'em were croupy last night," she said. " Do shut your mouth, Ruby. Keepin' it open like that you'll be croupy again, sure as sure ! "

" I wish Mrs. Smithers hadn't asked me to go to the carpenter," Dimples said, in a rather worried tone of voice. " They say he's sort of funny. What's the matter with him anyway ? "

Opal gave her shoulders an expressive little shrug. " I dunno exactly. Nobody knows where he came from, he just bobbed up out of nowhere."

Dimples looked incredulous. " He just couldn't bob up out of nowhere."

" Well, nobody knows where, anyway. He never smiles, and he's got a piano."

" A piano ? "

Opal nodded. " He bought it on the 'stalment plan at Cole's sale. He sings and plays on it. Maw knows because she cleans for him twice a week. She's there now, so you needn't be scared. She says there's something mighty *mysterious* about him." Dimples could tell by the way Opal pronounced it that she loved the sound of that word.

John Kenwood had appeared in Mayfield just after the death of Jake Stevens, the carpenter. He had bought the house and business from Jake's widow, and, when she had moved away, had very quietly taken possession of the house and little workshop, which seemed almost immediately to acquire a more efficient and businesslike aspect. John Kenwood was a good workman, there was no doubt about that, the townsfolk who employed him gave him full credit. But the man himself was queer, that was the general comment. Silent, shunning companionship, almost furtive in his actions, he repelled all would-be friendly advances. Even on a Saturday night, when, carefree at the thought of a week's work behind them, the men loafed at the corner of Main and James Streets, John Kenwood, his arms laden with bundles, supplies evidently for his lonely housekeeping, would pass

with a curt nod which effectually repelled all further advances.

"He just seems to be saying," Pete Chilliby remarked to the Rev. David Grant, "you mind your business, and I'll mind mine."

"And he does that," David Grant agreed, "remarkably well."

There was nothing very mysterious about the appearance of the village carpenter when he answered Dimples' knock on the door of the little workshop that afternoon, though his manner was abrupt, almost curt as he answered her questions, and then, evidently feeling that the conversation was over, made a movement to shut the door.

But Dimples was grasping her courage, as it were, with both hands, and blurted out the thought which was uppermost in her mind. "Somebody was telling me," she said, "that—that you have a piano."

He looked surprised. "I have. What of it?"

"W-would you ever think of—of l-letting another p-p-person play——" In spite of her valiant efforts Dimples' courage failed, and she backed suddenly down the steps.

But there had been something very appealing about those grey eyes, about the stammered, half-formed question. The man opened the door wide. "Girl," he called. "Girl, come back!"

Dimples, catching the command, turned and walked back. She was really rather frightened. The question had been a sudden impulse on her part, and perhaps he was angry. Perhaps he was going to act queer. So Dimples, in answer to that call, came back very reluctantly indeed.

But he didn't look angry, and his words didn't sound queer a bit. " If you're meaning that you would like to try my piano—you may," he said.

" Oh no, really, never mind," Dimples gasped, " I shouldn't have hinted."

" Why not ? " the man demanded. " The piano's there, untouched all day. Go on in, and feel quite easy about it. Mrs. Flinders is in there cleaning up. She'll show you the way."



Well, of course, there was nothing alarming about the thought of a house with Mrs. Flinders inside, though the little woman was very much surprised to see Dimples.

" Sent you in to try the piano ? " she repeated. " Well, of course, go on, try it," she eyed the piano suspiciously, " though what in the world a man what's a carpenter wants with a piano beats me. If it was a grammerphone now, there'd be some sense in turnin' it on when he was tired o' nights——" The little woman raised a grimed and toil-worn hand and pushed a wisp of hair back out of her eyes. " That's what I'm hopin' fer when I get to heaven, a grammerphone goin' hard all day, and

they'll say to me, 'Now you just set down a bit, Mother Flinders, and listen.' And I would!" The little woman dropped to her knees beside her bucket and brush. "Oh, *wouldn't* I listen!"

She squatted back on her heels when Dimples played. "Oh, go on, dearie," she begged, during a pause, "that's swell. Tum-tum-tum-ti, tum-tum-tum-ti! Whoever learnt you to do that?" Mrs. Flinders' brush kept time to the tune, "Tum-tum-tum-ti!"

At the end of an hour Dimples went to the door of the little workshop. "Thank you," she said, "ever and ever so much. I haven't felt so—so unlonely since I left home."

The carpenter turned from his bench. "Step in," he said. There was something akin to a smile on his face as he confronted her, which Dimples noticed with surprise. Hadn't Opal said that the carpenter had never been seen to smile? "Then you love music?" he was asking.

Dimples' curly head nodded vigorously. "And you do too?"

"I do. And it makes you feel—unlonely?"

Dimples nodded again.

"How would it be if you came here and used my piano a couple of hours a week?"

"You're not—really—meaning—that?"

"I am. Come the days Mrs. Flinders is cleaning up, Tuesdays and Fridays. She'd enjoy it, too. Would you like that?"

"Like it?" Dimples echoed, "Like it?" Then she smiled up at him, "I just guess you know I would!"

"All right," he said, turning back to his work.

" Come along, then, after school, Tuesdays and Fridays."

Tuesdays and Fridays ! Tuesdays and Fridays ! Dimples repeated the phrase as she walked briskly along Main Street, not noticing the biting cold now, but feeling instead a warm glow enveloping her. " Oh say ! " she exclaimed right out loud, " won't I just love Tuesdays and Fridays ! "

Mrs. Smithers, as might be expected, was unsympathetic, even rather resentful. " You're going to practise on the carpenter's piano ? " she repeated. " I don't see how you can play on his when you can't play on mine."

" But some of the notes on yours won't play," Dimples explained. " They're *dumb !* "

Mrs. Smithers' thin lips were very set and tight. " I'll be bound they wouldn't be dumb if you whacked them hard enough," she said. " Well, go on, have your own way, play on the carpenter's piano if you want to, but never expect me to sit and listen, and say how nice you play, for I won't do it ! "

But not even Mrs. Smithers could dampen Dimples' enthusiasm, and her dreams that night were those in which herself, pianos, carpenters, hammers, and notes of music were all mixed up in bewildering but delightful confusion.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

"JUST BECAUSE OF YOU!"

"NO chance of hockey to-day," Norah Hill remarked from her vantage point at the school-room window, to the other girls clustered in a close group around the radiator. "It's snowing even harder than when we came to school, and then I could hardly get through the drifts."

Antagonism was very evident in the group around the radiator at that moment. Helen Jones was eyeing little Opal Flinders with a scornfully contemptuous glance. "If I had to wear a dress that was too short and had patches in the elbows," she was saying, "I wouldn't have a name like Opal."

Helen, of course, was a girl who had little regard for the feelings of others, and rather enjoyed teasing anyone, particularly a girl younger than herself. And it must be confessed that there *was* something rather ludicrous about little Opal Flinders in the skimpy blue serge dress with the patched elbows, and perhaps it was but natural that Helen should be quick to note the fact.

A dusky little flame of colour ran up into Opal's cheek. "Maw named me Opal," she said. "Don't you dare——"

Helen's laugh interrupted—mockingly derisive.

"Opal with patches! Opal with a dress that's——"

Suddenly an unexpected champion appeared beside Opal. Dimples Adair, her eyes flashing and her cheeks aflame, faced Helen Jones defiantly. "I'd rather be Opal with a patch in both my elbows than you without 'em!" she said. "And, knowing you, I wouldn't be called Helen, no, not for anything!"

"You weren't asked!" Helen retorted. "And I'll have you know my name means beauty and light."

"Well, let it, I don't care! I have a name that means something, too, much too beautiful to talk about out loud!"

And then she turned and walked away from the group, with her arm protectingly about the neck of little Opal Flinders.

In the hall just outside the classroom they met Peter McKay, and it so chanced that Peter chose that moment to make a rather unfortunate remark. "I was listening to you and Helen Jones giving it to each other. You've got some pep when you get going, haven't you, Dimp?"

The encounter had left Dimples' temper ruffled and uncertain. There was a warning snap in her eye as she turned towards him. "What did you call me?" she asked. "Say it again."

"Dimp! What's the matter with that? It's short for Dimples, isn't it?"

"Dimp? Don't you dare! You—you——"

"I will so, if I want to. You can't stop me! Dimp! Dimp!"

Dimples raised her hand and brought it down

suddenly over Peter's right ear. The action was so sudden and unexpected that it caught him unawares and almost caused him to lose his balance.

"You will not!" she said, and went off down the stairs.

Peter turned in the opposite direction. You couldn't strike back at a girl, of course, though it must be admitted that at the moment Peter was



longing to return Dimples a smack over her ear, to pull those bobbing curls of hers—pull them out by the *roots!* To give her a biff in the eye, a smack in the jaw—oh, Peter's thoughts just then were vicious and ruffian-like, as unlike the usual merry thoughts of Peter McKay as it was possible for them to be.

"I won't call her Dimp," he was assuring himself, "but I'll tell the other fellows to do it."

But the threat was not carried into action, for Dimples was waiting for him by the school steps that afternoon, almost buried she seemed to be in

a big drift of snow. " I'm waiting to tell you I'm sorry I smacked your ear," she said slowly, surreptitiously trying to see whether the ear in question had a smashed or flattened appearance. " It was a cowardly thing to do when you couldn't smack back. I'm sorry. I won't do it again."

There was, of course, only one way to answer a girl like that—to grin and say, " Oh, that's all right." And then a very gallant Peter indeed rose to the surface and added, " I don't mind having my ear smacked—by you ! " Which, more surprising still, was quite true at the moment. And with the admission Peter's sense of humour twinkled back into his blue eyes.

> " And then," Dimples recorded that night in a letter to Mrs. Perry Dawson, " then we both laughed. Isn't it funny how your madness goes right away when you laugh ? After that he took me down to see Nibbles. Oh, how he does love that rabbit ! "

Those letters that Dimples wrote each week to Mrs. Perry Dawson—which ended always with a ' kiss for wee Davy '—were forming an outlet for the oftentimes overwrought feelings of the young girl. Just a little ashamed, perhaps, she told of the encounter with Helen Jones—

> " When Helen said her name meant beauty and light, and looked so pleased with herself, something inside of me made me try to beat her out. Do you suppose Dorothy-Jean could mean anything better than that ? "

Mrs. Perry Dawson's answer was prompt and to the point—

> "Your name, little girl, is exactly what you make it. Your name is you. I know what Dorothy-Jean means to me—a curly-headed, grey-eyed, dimpled girl who is always ready to do things for other people, always ready to help——"

The letter fluttered from Dimples' fingers. "Is she talking about me?" she gasped. "Curly-headed, grey-eyed, dimpled—*that's* me, all right! But, 'always ready to do things'! 'Always ready to help'! Oh, jiminy crickets!"

Dimples would not have been Dimples at all if she had not been stirred by that letter to immediate action.

Six o'clock the next morning saw her tiptoeing downstairs to light the fire and set the table before Mrs. Smithers should appear. Three hours later she was in school, polishing the blackboard, filling the ink-wells, sharpening pencils—a little whirlwind of virtue and industry.

But often the path of other than the transgressor is hard. Disconsolately she wrote to Mrs. Perry Dawson—

> "I don't believe I'm meant to be a helping sort of person. Do you remember telling me that we ought to sow seeds of helpfulness? Well, I've tried, and I don't seem to be able to do it at all. I polished the blackboard in school, but did it too hard and it fell with an awful clatter. Everybody giggled. I got up early to light the fire for Mrs. Smithers, but it

smoked and she was mad. The way I'd rather help would be to sing at the concert at the Sunday school next Friday. But I'm not going to tell them I *can* sing, unless they ask me—not much ! "

Mrs. Perry Dawson's eyes twinkled as she read that letter. Almost she could see the emphatic nod of Dimples' curly head that accompanied those words—

" Helen Jones is going to ' perform,' as she calls it. She thinks she can sing, and if singing is squeaking, she certainly can go some ! "

Dimples' next letter was bubbling over with excitement :—

" The nicest thing happened yesterday. I was practising the piano at Mr. Kenwood's, warbling a little as I played—you know how. He came in and listened. Then he asked if I'd like him to train my voice a bit, said he understood music fairly well. Doesn't that seem funny when he's a carpenter ? We started right then and Mrs. Flinders told me afterwards that she just sat back on her heels, forgetting all about her scrubbing, and kept me company with a solo of her own. He says I have a voice of great promise ! I was so excited, that I couldn't sleep a wink all night, or, at least, only a few winks ! "

Though not one of the performers, Dimples was at the Sunday school concert the next Friday night, sitting beside Opal Flinders in the third

row. Opal in her "best" yellow dress—which Pearl had handed down, and which still miraculously retained a somewhat festive air—was almost breathless with excitement. Concerts or parties were scattered so sparsely through her fun-starved young life, that when they did occur she was out to drain from them the last drop of enjoyment.

"I wish," she said, looking at Dimples with openly admiring eyes, "I wish I was swell lookin' like you. I wish——"

"Sh-sh," Dimples whispered, "they're starting now."

It was the back of Helen Jones' head which Dimples was eyeing so resentfully. And Helen, important and self-conscious, on the "performer's bench," was unable to resist little backward glances in Dimple's direction, patronizing, pitying almost. Oh, her tilted little chin was very haughty and superior indeed.

But the fall that follows so surely on the heels of a haughty spirit was lying in wait for Helen Jones. Perhaps that same spirit had led her to attempt too much, for she had no music book with her when she sat down to play her own accompaniment. Once she had heard it said that a real musician scorned to carry music, and Helen had quite determined that on this occasion she would distinguish herself as one of the musically elect.

She had a nice little voice, fresh and sweet and young. Even Dimples was forced to admit that, though it must be confessed that the canker of jealousy in Dimples' mind caused her expressive nose to wrinkle disdainfully. "She needn't think

she's so smart," was the thought behind that wrinkle. " I wish I could show her how that should be sung ! "

But Helen's moment of triumph was drawing to a close. Just what made her hesitate and stumble over those well-known words, it is difficult to say. But as is so often the case the unexpected happens, and it was over that very familiar line that—as Peter McKay put it—" she came a cropper."

Without any sense of impending calamity she sang the words :—

> " All the tiny fairies,
> Dancing in the grass,
> Hark, hark, now listen——"

It was really a dreadful place to forget what came next, for that is exactly what her hearers were doing—listening just as hard as ever they could.

Dimples sat alert, tense. Helen had forgotten her piece ! A jubilant little thrill shivered up and down Dimples' spine.

With determination that was worthy of applause Helen was trying to capture those lost words, even starting all over again from the beginning of the verse. But at the end of the line she hesitated and stopped—" Hark, hark, now listen——"

But inside the mind of a curly-headed little girl in the audience a resolve was taking place. A resolve that was stimulated by a memory, a memory most unwelcome, it is true, but vividly clear. " Dorothy-Jean means to me a girl who is always ready to do things for other people, always ready to help ! " " And," Dimples realized now, " she was meaning me ! "

Gone was Dimples' triumph over her adversary's disgrace. Gone the jubilant little thrill. She stood up, slipped along the row, across to the piano, where, a second later, her curly head poked itself round the other side of the piano and her piercing whisper cut shrilly across the silence.

Helen caught eagerly at the words and, amid applause—for it had really taken courage to stick to it as she had done—finished triumphantly :—

> "All the tiny fairies,
> Dancing in the grass,
> Hark, hark, now listen,
> You may hear them pass."

After the concert was over the two young girls faced each other in the cloakroom. "That was nice of you," Helen Jones was saying slowly, diffidently, for it was not easy to voice such thoughts. "I don't believe I'd have done it for you."

"Oh, yes, you would," Dimples answered, a little diffidently too. "I—I knew the piece, you see, I just couldn't see you stuck."

And then suddenly Helen showed that underneath that rather supercilious little manner of hers was something very sincere and honest. "After this I'll like anyone called Dimples," she said, "just because of you!"

Those words remained with Dimples as she turned off Main Street on to Wood Street a little later. "I'll always like anyone called Dimples!" That's just what Mrs. Dawson said, she realized. "Our names are what we make them."

Dimples tilted back her head and looked up at

the stars. Nearer than usual, they seemed, and friendly. There was friendliness, too, in the world about her, friendliness brought about—though perhaps she did not realize it—by her own friendly little act.

" Our names are what we make them ! " The words repeated themselves in her mind, and as if in answer those others responded, " I'll always like anyone named Dimples—just because of you ! "



CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE BONNY BOUNCING TWINS

"MAW says," Opal Flinders was telling Dimples as they took turns in pushing the twins up and down Main Street that very bright and unusually mild afternoon early in February, " Maw says you sound lovely when you sing. She says she always forgets her scrubbin' and just sits back and listens when you're havin' your lesson. She says Mr. Kenwood sings nice, too, way down deep. We're kind of hopin' that maybe Crystal'll grow up and be a famous singer. She's got such a musical howl, different to Ruby when she cries. And she loves to bounce up and down on the old sofa to hear the springs squeak. Oh, she's musical, Crystal is. Ruby we kind o' think'll be an artist some day "—there was a shy little note in Opal's voice as she confided this ambition —" she got hold of a pencil once and scribbled all over the wall. Maw said that what she drew was as good's some pictures she once saw in an art gallery. You couldn't tell what they were neither. We had to stop Ruby doin' it, though Maw said it seemed a shame, because p'raps some day folks'd say ' Those pictures were drawn by Ruby Flinders,

the great artist, when she was nothin' but a baby ! ' Stranger things than that have happened, Maw says."

The twins were really too old and too big to be wheeled in a baby-carriage now. " But," as Opal pointed out, when some one remarked on the fact, " they're too little to walk all the time, and this is the only thing we've got on wheels."

It had always been a tight fit trying to wedge those two bouncing babies into the carriage which was originally intended for one. As if protesting at the combined weight it sagged forlornly over the wheels.

Sometimes the boys and girls on their way from school would grin derisively, for there was really something rather laughable in the sight of Opal Flinders pushing that decrepit old carriage.

As might be expected, it was Helen Jones who, that very afternoon, put the unexpressed jeers of those boys and girls into words. " If you knew how funny those big, fat babies looked in that old carriage," she scoffed, " you wouldn't be seen pushing them ! "

But Opal Flinders, secure in possession of those twins, was equal to Helen Jones. " I'd rather be me with them for sisters, than the Queen of England without 'em ! " she said. " And I wouldn't be you, Helen Jones, no, not for anything ! "

" Well," Helen retorted, " nobody asked you to. And nobody asked you to be Queen of England, either ! "

It was Dimples who whispered something comforting and reassuring into Opal's ear at that

moment, " I just guess Helen's jealous. I just guess she wishes she had spiffy twin sisters like yours ! "

It was characteristic of Dimples that her sympathy should extend farther than mere words. She wrote that night to her guardian—

> " You told me to let you know when there was anything I wanted. And I want this, badly. I want it more than I remember wanting anything before."

Briefly she set forth all necessary details, and finished up her letter—

> " And please get it here just as soon as you possibly can."

One morning Helen Jones came to school just brimming over with news. She was late arriving, but her friends could tell that something unusual was afoot by the way she flounced to her seat, tossed her head, and tried to telegraph something by eyebrow communication to Sally Maguire.

At recess it all came out. " We've got a new baby at our house ! " Helen told them all triumphantly. " And it's twins—girls ! "

To Opal Flinders it seemed quite the most dreadful thing that had ever happened. Twins ! Twins in the Jones' family ! Helen Jones—of all people in the world—had twin sisters !

Opal was a very miserable young girl when she called for Crystal and Ruby that afternoon. A tear, forming in the corner of her eye, rolled unheeded down the side of her nose. No longer

could she boast that theirs were the only twins in town. " If they'd been anywhere but in the Jones' family," she told herself disconsolately, " I'd have stood it better."

And then one day, a couple of weeks later, Helen invited her classmates up to her home for a peep at the twins. An inward stirring of curiosity prompted Opal to go, too. " I'm so glad I did," she told Dimples later on, " I might have gone on thinking they were twins like ours."

For at first sight of the tiny newcomers all resentment vanished. These—these red, wrinkled, ugly, little things were the twins Helen had been boasting about! Opal felt suddenly rather sorry for Helen Jones, and turned to offer comfort. " Never mind," she said, " p'raps they'll look better when they grow up. And, anyway, you couldn't expect two pairs of twins like ours in one town."

It was not until Opal was through the door and down the front steps that Helen recovered sufficiently to retort, " I wouldn't want twins like yours! "

But she experienced little satisfaction in the remark, because, even if Opal had heard, she would never have believed a statement like that, never.

It was an afternoon about the end of February that Opal stood in front of Thatcher's bun and cake shop, and, gazing speculatively in the window, tried to decide between the rival merits of buns with icing or buns stuffed with currants.

Still uncertain, she plumped Crystal into the carriage half on top of Ruby, and went into the

store. She had to wait a few minutes while Mrs. Thatcher waited on another customer, and a moment or two longer while that good woman, who had a warm spot in her heart for the Flinders' family, went back to the bake-shop for a fresh batch, so that it was quite ten minutes later when Opal returned to the twins.

She stood still and stared. The twins and carriage had gone—absolutely and completely gone!

She stared again, scarcely believing the evidence of her eyes, up and down the street, this way and that. Then tried to shout, to call their names, "Ruby! Crystal!" But no words came.

She dropped the bag of buns on to the step, and tore down Main Street to the corner, to the next, and next. Then up past Thatcher's again, up past the church.

It was there that she met Dimples. Somehow she made her understand. "Gone?" Dimples echoed, "They can't be gone!"

"But they are!" Opal gasped, her eyes wide with terror.

It seemed quite plain to Opal Flinders at that moment. Some one wanted their twins—so much at least was easy to understand—and had stolen them. That was all there was to it.

Dimples was very reassuring. "No one could steal them and keep them in a town like this without being found out," she said. "Some one's hidden them for a joke."

"Joke!" Opal echoed, the word a sob.

"You go down this side of Main Street, and I'll go that," Dimples directed, taking command

of the situation. " Look in every doorway and store; tell every one you see. We'll get the whole town on the hunt."

She was as good as her word. She rounded up Peter McKay and Bob Harris, both of them always ready to be on the job when action offered, and enlisted the help of old Pete Chilliby. Finally, she found Big Bill, the policeman. " It's up to you," she told him, puffed and breathless with her exertions, " you're the policeman ! "

Truth to tell, Big Bill was a little nonplussed and perturbed. To arrest a housebreaker, or quiet a Saturday night fight, these, most certainly he understood and could manage. But to hunt for a pair of babies——

A policeman, of course, seldom admits defeat, and Big Bill, bravely facing the situation, stalked importantly along Main Street.

Still the search went on. Still no trace of the missing babies. No one had seen them. No one had seen the carriage. " They must be somewhere ! " Opal gasped, clinging very, very tightly to Dimples' hand.

" We'll find them," Dimples said determinedly, unconsciously trying to buoy up her own faltering hopes.

Still the boys reported failure. Still Big Bill tramped this way and that. Still Old Pete shook his head and looked doubtful. Still no clue, no trace of the missing babies.

And then some one told Mrs. Flinders. Hatless, with her coat flung around her shoulders, she joined Opal on Main Street. " Opal," she cried out, " where are they ? "

" Oh, Maw," Opal sobbed, " that's what we're tryin' to find out ! "

Dusk was beginning to come down now over the little town. The search was organized afresh. Opal, unable to keep still for one moment, was off again down Main Street, into this store and that ; around one block, around another. And then on Blossom Street—oh, it was a faint cry, but not too faint for those straining, listening, big-sister ears—came Crystal's " musical howl." Sweeter than any music in the world to little Opal Flinders.

And so it was Opal who found them—Ruby underneath, tucked up warm and snug, and sound asleep. Crystal on top, voicing her protest against an unusual order of things by prolonged howls.

Opal gathered them back into her thin, eager, little arms. " Oh, darlin's ! " she sobbed. " Oh, darlin's ! "

Farther uptown in a richly-furnished house, Helen Jones was relating it all, with frightened, incoherent, little gasps, to her father. " We only did it for fun. Opal's so struck on those silly babies ! "

" Go on ! " There was an unusual stern note in his voice which dismayed Helen.

" We just—saw them there. I said, ' Let's push 'em round the corner to—to scare Opal.' "

" Yes ? "

" And then we got round the corner, and saw her coming—so we ran——"

" Pushing the carriage ? "

Helen gulped, and nodded. " And round the next corner. And Sally said, ' Let's shove them in here '—it was Grant's old place, empty——"

"Go on."

"Then—we were both scared—and left them there—and—and climbed over the fence, and ran——"

He stood up. "You'll come down with me now. Tell it all to Opal Flinders as you have told me. Then you'll apologize."

A very crestfallen and subdued young girl walked with her father down to the little shack on Shannon Street. It was a radiant-faced Opal who greeted them—Opal who listened with dawning surprise and horror as Helen related all she had told her father.

There was silence when she finished—a strained, eloquent silence. Opal was staring at her fixedly. What she wanted to tell Helen Jones was that she had been mean and wicked and horrid. That she was jealous of Ruby and Crystal because her own little twin sisters were so red and wrinkled and ugly. She wanted to tell her, too, that she, Opal Flinders, wouldn't have done a thing like that. No, not for anything in the wide, wide world.

But something in the kindly little heart of Opal sealed her lips on those words. It had been hard for Helen to apologize, she knew, and she had sounded sorry, terribly sorry.

"All right," she answered, a little stiffly, "it was nice of you to come and tell me. I'd have been sorry, too, if I'd been you. Only I wouldn't have done it."

Then Mr. Jones held out his hand, and it closed over Opal's thin little fingers. "I don't think Helen and Sally realized the seriousness of what they were doing at the time," he said, and added,

winning for himself a place in Opal's affections, " A jolly pair of babies like that are worth running off with, you know ! "

" Oh," Opal gasped, flashing into a wide smile. " You've said a mouthful, sir ! "

The very next morning there was another surprise for Opal Flinders, a bewilderingly delightful surprise this time.

Opening the front door to give the steps their customary early-morning sweep, Opal found it there, actually tied to the doorhandle with a long strong piece of string.

A go-cart it was—a double, twin, go-cart—brown wicker, new and shining and beautiful.

" Maw," Opal called. " Maw—maw—look at what's here ! "

" Maw," Pearl, Opal and the twins stared at it with startled, incredulous eyes.

" It can't be for us," Mrs. Flinders said, " and yet——"

" It's a twin go-cart," Opal found her breath, " and we've got the twins ! "

And then they found a white envelope tied to the handle. " For Ruby and Crystal," the note read, " with very much love from Opal's friend, Dimples Adair."

And then Opal broke down and cried a little, cried just because it was so unexpected—so unexpected and beautiful and shining and new.

" There, there ! " Mother Flinders comforted. " Think how bonny our babies'll look."

" Oh, Maw," Opal gasped, " won't they just ! "

A little later she tried to thank Dimples Adair—

tried and failed. " Oh, that's all right," Dimples said. " I thought you'd like it."

" Like it ! " Opal echoed. " Like it ! "

In all the length and breadth of the land there was not a prouder girl than little Opal Flinders as she walked along Main Street that afternoon—chin up, eyes alight, cheeks aflame—pushing the bonny, bouncing twins in the wicker go-cart—new and shining and beautiful.



CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE CHILDREN'S CHOIR

IT was a great morning for Peter McKay. For the first time since Dimples Adair had become a member of their class, his name headed the monthly test lists. Peter pretended, of course, that he didn't care, that it really meant nothing to him, but he couldn't resist strutting off to meet Dimples to apprise her of the result of that test. "Hello," he greeted her, "seen the lists yet?"

Dimples looked at him shrewdly. "You wouldn't be asking that unless—— Peter, are you at the top?"

"Sure!"

"Well," Dimples said sharply, "don't you ever dare do it again!"

"I will too!"

"You won't," Dimples retorted as she flounced

off. "You won't because you won't get a chance."

But such a threat meant hard work. It meant that she must study at night. It meant that she must capture those vagrant thoughts that soared off into such alluring day-dreams and concentrate instead on stern, unrelenting facts.

> "I'm studying very hard," she wrote to her uncle, "because I want to keep ahead of Peter McKay. He thinks he's so smart, all boys do, I guess, and I want to show him that he isn't."

Life, of course, was not all work and no play during those late winter days in the prairie town of Mayfield. There were snow-shoe tramps out over the plains, there was an occasional jolly sleigh ride in the big sleigh behind old February. There was skating on the rink around the soldier's statue in Memorial Park on Main Street.

It was here that Dimples noticed Opal Flinders standing on mild days, when the wind was not too cold for the twins, watching the flying figures on the ice. "Why don't you come on out too?" she called one afternoon.

Opal shook her head. "I haven't any skates," she said, sounding rather as if she was ashamed of the confession.

"Oh!" Dimples said, then added impulsively, "Supposing you wear mine for a while and let me stay with the twins."

"No," Opal said, but involuntarily she loosened her hold on the handle of the go-cart. She had skated before, of course, on a well-worn pair of

skates which Pearl had handed down, so Opal was open to conviction now, and a few minutes later she was skimming over the ice while Dimples tried to quiet the twins, who, after viewing her with questioning eyes, voiced their protest against this innovation with Flinders-like fervour.

" We'll just switch, sometimes," Dimples told Opal later on. " You take my skates and I'll take your twins. I'd like to wheel them, anybody would."

" I've never seen folks exactly scramblin' for the job," Opal said. " All right then, we'll do it. You mustn't mind if they howl a bit. It's me they're used to, you know ; anyone else looks sort of funny to them, I guess."

But one day a curious thing happened. Opal saw those twins as Dimples pushed them away, and they were smiling, laughing in fact, showing all their dear little pearls of teeth of which Opal was so proud.

She stood quite still and stared after them. Suppose, just suppose, those twins—those bonny, bouncing twins—should get to like Dimples better—better than—oh, they couldn't ! It was unthinkable !

Opal shot to the end of the rink, took off her skates, and dashed after the retreating Dimples. " I'm not going to skate to-day," she called. " I—I don't feel like it."

Dimples stared at her. " But you started——"

" And stopped. I'll take 'em," Opal grasped the handle of the go-cart as she spoke, and walked on, leaving Dimples, obviously puzzled, as she went back to the rink.

" Darlin's," Opal was saying, a world of pleading in her voice. " You do like to have me pushin' you, don't you? You wouldn't like nobody else nearly as well, would you? Not even if she had curls'n dimples'n things what I haven't got? "

" Goo-goo ! " said one twin.

" Yum-yum ! " said the other.

Which may have meant a very great deal, or nothing at all, but it seemed, at any rate, to satisfy the eager little heart of their big sister, Opal.

It was music which was filling Dimples' thoughts those days, filling them with day-dreams as she left the carpenter's house after her lessons. With the strains of the song she had practised ringing in her ears, and her thoughts soaring into the land of day-dreams, the tangible world about her was very unreal and remote. She collided one afternoon with Sally Maguire at the corner of Main Street. " Look out where you're going ! " Sally remonstrated.

" Oh ! " Dimples said, her thoughts recalled with a jerk, " I didn't know you were there."

" Well, I was."

" I was thinking," Dimples explained, rather breathlessly, " about the time I'm going to be a wonderful singer. I was standing on a platform——"

" But you weren't," protested the literal Sally. " You were here on Main Street."

" I was only *thinking* about standing on a platform, and drawing a deep breath and letting her rip until the folks in the audience jumped to

their feet, calling out, 'Wonderful, wonderful! Go on, do it again!' I was just drawing another breath when I bumped into you."

Mrs. Flinders was an appreciative audience at those lessons now, frankly discarding her bucket and brush and sitting quite motionless in a corner of the sitting-room.

And if Mrs. Flinders enjoyed those lessons there was no doubt about John Kenwood himself. Even Dimples could sense a little of what they meant to him, and wrote about it to Mrs. Perry Dawson—

> "They say he never smiles, but they just ought to see him at our lessons. His eyes smile and he looks just ever so happy. He calls me Miss Dimples, which makes me feel lovely and grown up. Sometimes he gets cross, that's when I put a darling little shake and quiver into my voice. I just love shakes and quivers, like Butterball's trills, you know, but he sort of shudders and says, 'No, no, be natural.'"

But even Dimples could not realize the happiness which that music was singing into the heart of John Kenwood. None but himself could know that only during those hours of song did the vivid, terrible memory of those past years fade a little.

Suddenly, it seemed, there was a feeling of spring in the air. Spring in the sunshine, warm and vivifying. Spring in the blueness of the sky overhead. Spring underfoot where the ice of

winter was giving way to the swish of miniature rivers that ran gurgling down the streets.

The road was open through to Goodcontent now, and one afternoon, with the prairie wind whistling its merry spring song about her ears, Dimples cantered February out to the McPherson farm.

"Dimples!" Sarah exclaimed.

"Dimples," Wee Sandy shouted, "it's Dimples!"

"Dimples!" the little school-teacher echoed, hurrying downstairs to join in the welcome.

Of course there was a feast in her honour around the big stove in the kitchen, a feast of cookies and doughnuts of Mrs. Sandy's own baking.

"Doesn't it feel lovely to be unsnowed?" Dimples asked the little school-teacher.

"Lovely! I felt as if I were in prison sometimes, though Mrs. Sandy's been ever so kind," she smiled across at the older woman, intent on preparations for supper. "She's letting me tick off the days on her calendar now. It isn't so long till I go back—June, you know." Suddenly she sat forward in her chair. "Dimples," she said, "I want to ask you something. Do you suppose your music teacher would teach music to these kiddies of mine if I brought them all in to him sometimes on a Saturday morning?"

"How in the world would you bring them all the way to Mayfield?"

"Oh, I'd manage that, hire a wagon or something. Do you think he would?"

Dimples shook her head doubtfully. "He's

sort of funny, you know. Keeps away from folks as if he didn't want to talk to them. But I'll ask him."

"Do!" Rose Denison said, realizing perhaps a little what powers of persuasion lay in the depths of those grey eyes.

John Kenwood looked very forbidding when Dimples put her request, shook his head, in fact, quite decisively. "I don't want to meet people," he said.

"But these aren't exactly people. They're just little kids. Most of them have come from Russia, or from somewhere away far off. And Miss Denison says that lots of them are fond of music, but get no chance to hear any away out there on the prairie, except over the radio. She says they'll love it if they learn to sing themselves."

"No," John Kenwood said. "No, I can't do it."

And then he noticed something—a very tiny something it was too—a little shining teardrop of disappointment in the corner of Dimples' eye.

And John Kenwood suddenly changed his mind. "All right," he said, "tell her to bring them once anyway, and I'll try."

That, of course, was how the Children's Choir came into being, for it was after hearing them practising under the skilful guidance of John Kenwood that the Rev. David Grant decreed that they must form a choir in the little Good-content church for the Sunday service.

The idea, original, perhaps even a little startling, met with instant response by the members of the choir. Everybody wanted to be in it—the young

Minchovs, the Dofeffs, the Popoff triplets, and the Lariins. On the first Sunday that the choir was in action a group of smiling young faces looked out over the adult portion of the little congregation. Very self-conscious and important that choir felt; very shining—cheeks scrubbed to the point of brilliance—and eager and happy they looked. Very sweetly the child-voices rose in the little frame building—

> " We too would bring our treasures,
> To offer to the King,
> We have no wealth or learning,
> What shall we children bring ? "

Perhaps even the children realized that their choir was a direct result of the influence of their school-teacher. " It's her," one of the Popoff triplets put it, ungrammatic but emphatic. " Her made us sing, and her tells us stories."

There were stirring stories of achievement in the little school those days. Perhaps the children themselves loved best of all the stories of pioneers in their own western land.

" They braved all, dared all," Rose Denison told them, " and sacrificed all for this country. They made it a land for us to love. And it's up to us, because we are young Canadians, to make of it a land for all to love. It is up to us to work hard, to study, to love truth and honour, so that Canada may be known as a land of fearless, honest, Christian men and women."

" Sure ! " they answered, squaring their shoulders, as if answering the challenge.

But it was about Benjamin Disraeli, English

statesman, that Sarah McPherson loved to hear. For some of the others it was not so interesting. How *could* a man who had merely made speeches in a British Parliament be as interesting as men who had tracked down bears'n things in their very own Canada? But on Sarah McPherson that story exercised a peculiar fascination.

"Disraeli's sister, Sarah," Rose Denison told them, "worked and hoped and prayed that her brother might succeed. She had always tried to help him, and sisters *can* help, you know. When success came she was just as proud, perhaps even prouder than he. Somehow it seemed as if she had always known, Sarah Disraeli, that her brother would be a great man."

Sarah McPherson, listening, eagerly drinking in every word, glanced across at Wee Sandy. He, too, would do wonderful things when he grew up. Oh she, like that other Sarah, felt confident in her heart that one day her little brother would be a great man.

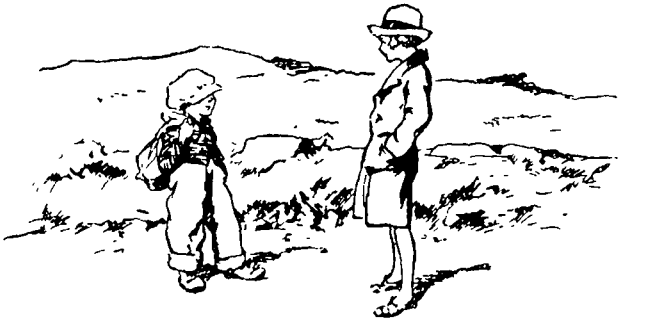
Rose Denison stood one evening in early spring on the steps of the farm and looked out over the prairies. It was almost warm, that March wind, as it blew in softly from the plains. Over to her right was the Minchov farm. The voices of the young Minchovs came to her ears. Each returning bound of the swing brought Minnie's head bobbing above the fence. On the far side of the farm the windbreak of pines—planted by his grandfather in 1885, so Wee Sandy had told her—stood strong and erect against the clear sky.

They seemed at that moment to Rose Denison

to be symbolic—young, vigorous, strong—of the new virile country, this young Canada.

She turned back to the house with the song of the poet on her lips :—

> " Trees of beauty and height and grace,
> To stand in beauty before His face."



CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE KINDLY CARPENTER

IF it hadn't been for Miss Rutherford's talk in the health class, it might never have happened at all. For if Miss Rutherford had not spoken about the health-giving value of walking Dimples might never have started on that early-morning walk along the Lone Wolf Trail, and so perhaps might never have seen the boy.

" Walking," Miss Rutherford told the class, " is one of the finest forms of exercise. It helps, perhaps better than anything else, to keep us fit."

And put that way " keeping fit " sounded very desirable indeed. Dimples told her uncle about it in a letter that night—

> " Are you walking enough, Uncle Gus ? Miss Rutherford says that when folks give up walking they get lazy and heavy and fat, and then they can't think properly. It would be just dreadful if you got lazy and heavy and

fat and couldn't think properly, wouldn't it ? "

That suggestion of Miss Rutherford's was quite enough to send Dimples, with Dimples-like enthusiasm, for a walk before school the next morning.

It was then that she met the boy, a very small boy, with a bundle over his shoulder, and a cap—that really wasn't intended for a small boy at all—pulled low over his eyes.

" Hello," Dimples greeted him, realizing that he was not one of the local boys. " Where are you going ? "

The answer was brief. " Nowhere."

" But you must be going *somewhere !* "

" Well, it's none of your business if I am," he said, twitching his cap still lower over his eyes, " so shut up ! "

" Smarty ! " Dimples retorted, thinking that he was really quite a horrid little boy, but, acting on impulse, she turned and walked with him, venturing at last to break the long silence. " Where did you have your supper last night ? "

" Didn't have none."

" Oh ! " Dimples said.

At that moment she decided that something must be done about it. Most certainly a supperless little boy couldn't be left breakfastless too.

" No wonder he's so cross," Dimples thought with sudden sympathy. " Boys always are when they're hungry."

Her thoughts flew ahead to Mayfield. Who

would give him breakfast? Mrs. Smithers? But she didn't like boys. "Scallywags!" she called them, and sounded as if she meant it. Pete Chilliby of the King George? Oh, he'd be glad to do it. Or Mr. Grant, the minister. He loved all kinds of boys, anyone could tell that.

Dimples gave a little sigh of relief. After all, when you started to think, it was easy to find folks who were kind.

She quickened her steps. "Come on," she said, "we'll see about getting you something to eat."

That at least aroused a gleam of interest in the boy's eyes. "Now you're talking!" he said.

It seemed the veriest chance that they should meet John Kenwood on their way into Mayfield. John Kenwood, as every one knew, took an early-morning walk each day. "Hello!" Dimples greeted him blithely. "I found this little boy. Now I'm taking him to get something to eat."

John Kenwood looked down at the little stranger. "Where were you aiming for, son?"

"None o' your business!" the small boy answered.

But John Kenwood understood that attitude, none better. Times without number he had taken refuge in that sanctuary of silence and unfriendly rebuff.

He said nothing in reply, but shortening his strides he walked along beside Dimples and the boy. Curiously enough, it was the lad who put the next question, "And where d'you think you're goin'?"

"Home," the man said.

Thus it seemed to come about quite naturally that, when they reached the carpenter's house, he should ask, casually, " How'd you like a bite of breakfast with me ? "

" Oh, wouldn't I just ! " The boy pushed back his cap and looked up out of a pair of wide, eager, brown eyes. Then he hesitated. " Are there folks in there ? "

John Kenwood shook his head. He understood that too—the desire to dodge " folks." " Just myself and the cat," he answered, and turned to Dimples. " Shall I take him in ? "

Dimples laughed. " Do ! " she said.

The man turned and stepped into the house and the boy followed. They had breakfast together—oatmeal and cream, brown bread-and-butter and honey. Together they tidied the house and, when the man went out into the workshop, the boy raked the garden. Together they had dinner, both silent, both well content. Together they went out into the workshop, where the boy, perched a-top a barrel, watched with fascinating eyes John Kenwood's plane gliding over the smooth wood with the sure swift strokes of a master workman. The shavings, thin and curling, caught the gleams of the sunlight as they fell to the floor and piled in an airy golden heap.

Neither spoke until at last the man looked up and smiled. " Well ? " he said.

The boy grinned back with perfect understanding. " Well yourself ! " he answered.

It was not until the shadows were long, until a little coolness crept with the dusk into the workshop, that the boy told his story.

He was a ward of the Boys' Home, it seemed. He had been " boarded out " with a farmer since before Christmas. He hadn't been well before that and they thought the country would do him good. It *had* done him good, nothing so nice, he said, had ever happened to him before. But he was all better now, and was to return to the city. He had to leave the horses and the cows—he choked a little there, and drew the back of his hand over his eyes. " And so," he added simply, " I beat it ! "

" Beat it ? "

" Ran away so's they couldn't send me back to the city."

" And that's what you're doing now, running away ? "

He nodded.

" What's your name ? "

" Bunny."

" Bunny what ? "

" I dunno. Buddy was sewn on my shirt, the Matron said, when they took me into the Home, but because my ears looked like a rabbit's, the fellars changed it to Bunny."

John Kenwood finally broke the long, thoughtful silence which followed. " You'd better," he said slowly, " stay here all night."

" Sure ! " the boy agreed readily.

Next morning in the workshop they spoke about it again. " How'd it be," John Kenwood asked, the question the result of a long, sleepless night, " if I asked the Boys' Home if you might stay here for a bit ? "

" With you ? "

" With me."

" That," Bunny said, very deliberately, " that'd be swell, sweller than anything I've ever thunk about before. But couldn't I just—just stay without asking them at all ? They're sure to say no."

The man looked down at the eager little boy, thinking that if the Boys' Home directors knew that John Kenwood (late No. 49) was applying for the custody of one of their wards, they most certainly would refuse.

" We'll have to ask," he said, reluctantly. " At the present moment, as far as the Boys' Home and that farmer are concerned, you are a lost boy, and if I kept you without notifying them I'd be kidnapping, you know."

Bunny grinned—that very sudden, attractive little grin of his. " I'd like to be kidnapped—by you, sir ! " he said.

And at the words something which had lain dormant in the heart of John Kenwood awakened to life, awakened to sing its own little song of gladness and thanksgiving.

He took the Rev. David Grant into his confidence. " I'd like to keep the lad," he said. " We seem, somehow—well, to understand each other. But will they let him stay, do you suppose, when they know about—about me ? "

David Grant was silent. It was a tragic story the man had unfolded—of a sadly neglected boyhood ; of running wild and getting in with " the gang " ; of the lawless days which followed. And then had come the episode—oh, John Kenwood's face lighted up as he told of it. " It was like you

read about in old books," he said. Of being " discovered " by an eccentric, musical genius, of work and training, indulging his inherent love of music to his heart's content. But then, cutting in on it all had come the death of his patron, and John Kenwood had drifted quickly back to " the gang "—to lawlessness and banditry once more. And then at last the gang itself had been rounded up and " run in." Then had come prison, which, strangely enough, had opened the door of opportunity for John Kenwood.

" I got to thinking in there," he said slowly. " I'd never thought much before. I'd just done the next thing next, like a bird builds a nest. But when I *did* think——" he paused, for it was not easy to express in words—" when I *did* think, I sort of realized that I'd be out again some day—it wasn't a long term—that I'd have to go on living in the outside world. And I knew then that I just couldn't go back to the life the gang had led. There were books in prison, and music—they'd let me play for chapel—and there was a minister-chap like yourself. And the books and music and him together showed me——"

" That life could mean something really worth while ? "

He nodded. " I learnt the trade in there—carpentering. And when I came out it was the minister-chap who told me about Jake Stevens, and lent me money to buy the business. I'm paying it back, bit by bit." John Kenwood's thin shoulders straightened. " He's going to get it all too."

And so David Grant was silent as he stared

thoughtfully across at this man, this man who had vaguely seen through prison windows the promise of life.

"And now," he said slowly, "you're wanting this boy?"

John Kenwood nodded again. "We seem to sort of take to each other, the little fellow and I."

At that moment David Grant realized that it must be brought to pass, what seemed impossible must be achieved.

He went by train into the city. He spent long hours tracing back the record of John Kenwood; spent further hours with the officials of the Boys' Home. "If——" they conceded at length, "if we can be assured that you will undertake oversight of this boy——"

"I'll undertake that," David Grant promised; "only the boy's new father must not know."

Triumphantly he returned to Mayfield, carrying the good news to John Kenwood.

There followed busy, happy days of readjustment for the boy. It was necessary, of course, that he should attend school. The idea met with strenuous opposition and vigorous protest from Bunny himself. But after his first day or so he was reconciled. Here were boys and girls with plump freckled cheeks, laughing faces and wide, eager eyes. Dimly he remembered other faces, young too, back before the Home days—thin, drawn, tired faces. Remembered, too, a little girl who had snatched a crust from him, and he had grabbed it back and eaten it before her hungry eyes. He pushed that picture back out of his

mind now, and let that other in instead—the back of Susie Hill's head, her bobbing curls, " Hollow, like lovely pea-shooters ! " Bunny thought.

And then one Friday afternoon Dimples Adair took him out for the story-telling hour in Rose Denison's school. And it was after this that the little faculty which had evidently been suppressed in Bunny's mind suddenly developed and re-asserted itself.

It was a " creative imagination." That, at least, was what David Grant called it. " If we guide him in the right direction now he may turn to good account later on," he told John Kenwood.

Oh, Bunny's " creative imagination " soared during those days, soared into far, vast spaces of that country of fancy and romance, its heights and depths known only to himself.

" I tracked a bear this morning," he told David Grant, chancing to meet him one morning on the way to school.

" Oh ? " the minister answered pleasantly. " And was it a white or a brown bear ? "

" Brown," Bunny answered, delighted at the ready response. " Brown, with a—a white nose and lo-ong black tail with white tip."

At that the Rev. David Grant appeared very thoughtful. " A long black tail with a white tip ? " he repeated. " Have bears really got long tails, Bunny ? "

And Bunny suddenly became very subdued and thoughtful too.

But it was around his new father that his imagination ran riot. " My dad," he told a group

of young friends, gathered one rainy afternoon in a loft which John Kenwood had built for them over the little workshop. " My dad——"

" He isn't really your dad," some one interrupted.

" He hasn't been, but he is now, and he's going to be for ever." Bunny was confident and convincing. " My dad's sailed the high seas——"

" What're the high seas ? "

" And——" he went on, scorning the attempt to unearth knowledge not in his keeping, " and he's killed lions'n things in Indiar too—" He stopped suddenly, remembering what Mr. Grant had said. " When you are telling something that's made up, Bunny, let the other fellows know it's made up. They'll like it just as well. But if you're telling something that's true, stick to the truth."

" Anyhow," Bunny added now, in the light of that remembrance, " anyhow, he'd have sailed the high seas and shot those lions in Indiar—if he'd had the chance."

From his pocket he produced a pen-knife. " An' oh, say," he added, his voice deep and mysterious. " Oh, say, the things he's done with this ! "

" What ? " they breathed in chorus, struck by the tangible evidence into a believing frame of mind.

" Oh—er—things ! "

" Why doesn't he tell us some of them ? "

Bunny shook his head. " Y' can't make him tell all the things he's done. He ain't that kind. No, sir."

Perhaps John Kenwood himself might never have been aware of this particular phase of Bunny's " creative imagination," if David Grant had not enlightened him. " You're the hero of it all," he told him. " Bunny, because he possesses you, is the envy of every small boy in town. Oh, he's proud of you, John, he's proud of his new dad ! "

And at that a little resolve awakened in John Kenwood's mind. " If Bunny's proud of me," he told himself, " I'll give him something to be proud of ! " And it was in the nature of a vow that he said it.

All unsought for, that opportunity came.

One morning he had been engaged on work in the village of Goodcontent, and, riding back at noon along Main Street in Mayfield, he noticed a small boy a-top White Jack, a big farm-horse. Now White Jack was as steady and amiable and good-natured as it is possible for a farm-horse to be. But on this particular morning two things, happening simultaneously, threw White Jack into a temporary panic. The twelve o'clock express, as it crossed Main Street, let out an ear-splitting shriek as a warning to one of Farmer Brown's cows on the track ahead. At the same time Wringer's Laundry sounded its noon-time whistle. White Jack, dismayed and terrified, gave a start, plunged, and then galloped madly down Main Street.

It was but the work of a moment for John Kenwood to see what had happened, jump down, run to meet the approaching horse, grab those trailing reins, and, though dragged for a few feet himself, finally bring White Jack to a standstill.

There were willing hands to help him up, and kindly efforts to stop the trickle of blood down the side of his face. Eager hands were there to lift down the frightened little boy—Teddy Thatcher, it proved to be — who had in some miraculous manner stuck on during that short, wild dash.

But to John Kenwood went the glory, the honours of the day. Oh, the story grew in magnitude as it went the rounds. John Kenwood, at risk of life and limb, had stopped a madly plunging horse and saved Teddy Thatcher from the jaws of death—so the story went.

And thus it greeted Bunny as he came out of school. He flushed scarlet with the intensity of his feelings as he listened, his mind picturing it all before him—the speeding horse, the little boy, his dad dashing out——

" Of course," he said, as he took his way down the school steps with exaggerated indifference, " that ain't s'much. My dad's always been a hero. He can't help it; that's what he *is*—a hero ! "

But once around the corner, out of sight of his friends, even the most discerning eye could not have seen Bunny's heels for dust. He covered the distance in record-breaking time and burst into the workshop in a frenzy of breathless excitement. It was a trifle disappointing, of course, to find that his dad's head was not all bound up—as Bunny had visualized it during the run home. But there was a long, satisfactory strip of plaster down his left cheek, which was, after all, gloriously evident.

" Come on out," Bunny pleaded, " and let the fellers see."

But John Kenwood shook his head. " No," he said firmly. " No."

And so Bunny was forced, nothing loath it is true, to receive the congratulations himself. " My dad ! " was proclaimed in his arching chest, in the swagger with which he walked—blatantly, glowingly conscious of the achievement of " My dad ! "

Dimples Adair stepped into the carpenter's little shop that afternoon. " I met Bunny and he told me how brave you were this morning," she said.

" It was nothing," the man answered. " No more than anyone would have done."

" Bunny's looking so happy," Dimples told him. " Oh, you *have* been kind to him—and to me, too, lending me your piano and giving me lessons." At the door she paused and looked back. " I wonder," she added, as if thinking aloud, " I wonder if all carpenters are kind."

" I never heard that they were."

She smiled as she opened the door. " I think perhaps they are, because once there was another kind carpenter—in Nazareth, you know."

The door closed. The latch slipped down into place with its accustomed rattle. The man was alone. He stood there beside the bench, quite motionless, his plane slipping unheeded from his hand. Across the silence of the little shop, piercing the veil with which he had shrouded the vivid memory of the past years, those words rang

clearly, " Once there was another kind carpenter—in Nazareth ! "

The man's head fell forward into his arms outstretched over the bench. And at that moment the memory of the kindly carpenter of Nazareth illumined the little shop.



CHAPTER TWENTY

MOTHER OF PEARL

MOTHER of Pearl! That was what she loved to call herself, little Mrs. Flinders, with the soul of an artist and the heart of a mother. Mother of Pearl! She loved that phrase, loved to roll it, as it were, around her tongue, Mother of Pearl—and of Opal and the twins.

Perhaps it was easy for her to find joy in life, in a life that might have appeared to others joyless and drab. There was the house on Shannon Street which the townsfolk called the Flinders' shack, but to Mother Flinders it was home, home where she returned after the day's work to slip her tired and aching feet into easy flapping slippers; home where the twins crowed a noisy welcome; where the kettle boiled with a more cheerful hum than any place else on earth.

There was joy in her family—her "handful of jewels." Joy in work, too, some of it; in her work in Jones' big house with its shining furniture, and beautiful pictures; joy in working in the Bake Shop with its savoury inviting odours. Joy

in cleaning the carpenter's house while Dimples Adair sang. But better than all these did Mrs. Flinders enjoy those evenings when it fell to her lot to wash the floors in Jones' Dry Goods Store. The floor-washing itself was no enviable job, but was a necessary evil to be endured and accepted. But " between whiles," as she put it, to sit back on her heels and to look at the dresses—oh, then it was that the soul of Mrs. Flinders, the artist, rose in triumph.

It seemed to her as if those soft, silky fabrics flamed deeper and more beautiful on these early spring-time evenings. There was one dress in particular—she would look for it when she went up-stairs each evening, breathing a little sigh of relief to find it still there. Glowing, and rosy, and vivid, it seemed to catch and reflect the light from the electric bulbs that illumined the scene of Mrs. Flinders' work.

" It's like the sky at sunset ! " declared Mrs. Flinders, the artist.

" 'Twould look lovely on my Pearl ! " decided Mrs. Flinders, the mother.

Gently, reverently almost, she touched it. Its soft silk rasped a little against the rough surface of her thumb.

She pointed it out to Pearl one night, Pearl who came in sometimes to help her mother through. " It's lovely ! " Pearl agreed.

It was just a few evenings later that it happened.

Pearl had come early, had helped a little and then gone home. " Bill's sister's having a party," she explained. " I've got to get dressed."

Mrs. Flinders smiled as the girl's retreating

footsteps echoed in the empty store. "Bill!" You could tell by the girl's tone that it meant to her something more than a mere name.

Mrs. Flinders climbed the stairs, her thoughts running back with Pearl into the street, on toward home—she hoped they'd be careful about a draught on Ruby, Ruby whose throat was so tender.

She paused as usual at the top of the stairs and looked over towards the welcome flame of colour that she knew would spring out of the shadow—

The dress had gone.

Mrs. Flinders grasped the banister and stared—incredulous at first. Gone! Then with a little sigh she turned to go about her work. It had been foolish ever to suppose that it would stay there—always. Some one, some one young and vivid, had liked it too, was, even now, perhaps, wearing it.

Listlessly Mrs. Flinders went about her work. Perhaps she was more tired than usual, for Ruby had been croupy last night, which had meant little sleep—a poor beginning for a hard day's work. But perhaps, too, she really missed that flaming touch of colour which had been somehow so friendly in the shadows of the store. At any rate, certain it was that Mrs. Flinders' troubles loomed up, large and forbidding, at the moment. Work seemed to stretch ahead, down a long vista of years into the future—work, work, work, daily, unending, back-breaking work.

Then suddenly the real Mother Flinders—the Mother Flinders who had braved those first dreadful days after her husband had left her, who

had faced the consequences with a spirit unafraid and fine—came to the surface.

"What're you grumblin' at?" she demanded of herself. "You, mother of Pearl and Opal and the twins? You, with your handful of jewels, the envy of all the ladies in town!"

Perhaps it was an exaggeration. Perhaps few really envied Mrs. Flinders of Shannon Street her handful of jewels—but the thought brought balm and comfort to Mother Flinders herself.

A little later she returned to Shannon Street, opening the door with that secure sense of relief. Behind her was a day of work, well done. Ahead an hour or so of rest.

Pearl, standing in the centre of the little dining-room, turned abruptly as her mother entered. "Oh!" she exclaimed, "I thought I'd be gone before you got here. Now look here, mother, it's no use making a fuss. There it is! I meant to keep it on, but I'm not wearing it after all."

Mother Flinders stared, and stared again. "There it is!" The phrase beat with peculiar insistence into her brain. There it is! The dress! The dress which had flamed in the shadows! The dress which had disappeared! Gone? It was in her room now, over the back of one of her chairs!

Before the dawning horror in her mother's eyes Pearl backed nearer the door. "It's no use making a fuss," she repeated, curiously collected and calm. "I didn't steal it, mother. I didn't mean to. I only meant to—to borrow it, borrow it for the party to-night, and then press it and take it back to the store in the morning. No one need

ever to have known. I put it on, meaning to wear it—it looked fine too—but I—I couldn't somehow." She eyed the dress almost as if she hated the sight of it there—a bright flame in the dim room. " I guess we're not the kind of folks that can wear things that don't belong to us. I guess you've raised us different. Oh, here's Bill ! "

Rooted to the spot where she stood, speechless with surprise and horror, Mother Flinders watched her go.

A few minutes later she faced Opal across the dining-room table. It was very quiet with only the tick of the alarm clock on the shelf to break the stillness.

" She took it," the little woman said at last in a whisper. " She meant to wear it ! "

" But she didn't ! "

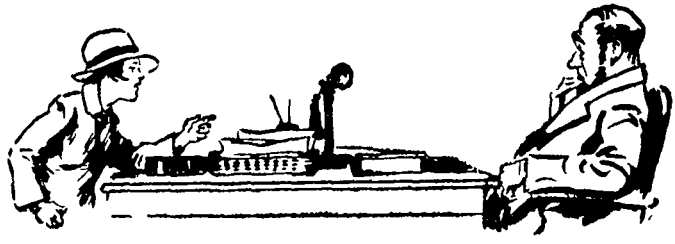
" She didn't ! " the little woman echoed.

" Maw—we'll have to take it back."

" Take it back quietly-like and—and say nothin' ? " There was a world of unconscious pleading in the little woman's voice, leaning eagerly for once towards the path of least resistance. " Do you suppose we could just sort of sneak it in and—and say nothin', like Pearl meant to do ? "

Opal sat very erect, curiously mature at the moment. " We could," she said slowly. " We could, Maw, but I don't think we will. I sort of wouldn't like to look Mr. Grant in the eye after we'd done that. No, we'll take it to Mr. Jones in the morning, and——" Opal choked a little, " tell him about it. We've gotta be honest, Maw, we've gotta be honest ! "

There was something oddly stimulating about those words. They came to the ears of the little mother as a challenge. She, too, sat very erect. "Yes," she repeated. "Yes, we've got to be honest!"



CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

"TO THE LITTLE LAWYERETTE!"

MRS. FLINDERS and Opal were obviously very nervous when they sought admission into the office of Samuel D. Jones early the next morning. Miss Gilpin, his secretary, who had recently come from the city and was not familiar with the local people, looked at them with evident suspicion and disfavour. "May I take a message?" she asked.

"We want to see Mr. Jones," Mrs. Flinders told her firmly, adding, as if for emphasis, "Himself!"

A few minutes later and they were facing "Mr. Jones, himself," who stared at them curiously out of none too friendly eyes. "Well," he asked, "what can I do for you?" His tone added, "Be as quick as possible, please."

The details of that office always remained imprinted vividly on Mrs. Flinders' memory—the feel of the soft rug under her feet; the shining oak furniture—its shine attesting to her own efforts; the little bald patch on Mr. Jones' head, shining

too. But the memory of her own part in it all, her explanation, was confused and vague.

But she knew that when she stopped speaking he was sitting forward in his chair. "And am I to understand," he asked, his voice cutting sharply across her consciousness, "that this"—indicating Opal—"is—er—the young lady who carried off the dress?"

"Oh no, sir, that's Opal. It was Pearl. She's older."

"And why didn't she bring it back herself?"

"She works in the Bakery, sir. She—she has to be there at nine—she's there now——"

"And her plan was to slip in early and return the dress?"

"Yes, sir. She—she thought nobody would ever know. She's young and pretty, Pearl is, and she loves pretty things——"

"That don't belong to her."

"But she—she didn't mean it that way, sir. Really she didn't. She saw how wrong it was as soon's she'd done it." Mrs. Flinders' toil-worn hands twisted nervously together. "And what I'm asking you is not to say, not to do anything about it. I'll pay you for—for Pearl taking the dress out, if you'll give me time. I'll work for you here for nothin'. But if you tell folks that I'm not honest, or that Pearl isn't——"

The trembling, pleading voice trailed off into silence. The interlocked hands were clenched tightly together. But in the eyes of the man facing the little woman there was an ominous, steely glitter. The whole affair was outside the sphere of his daily problems. He felt hopelessly and

utterly at a loss. And the feeling heightened his anger. " And am I to countenance dishonesty in my store by shielding every culprit ? " he demanded. " Borrowing, you call it——" he eyed her wrathfully. " Borrowing ! It's a pleasant word for theft ! "

Mrs. Flinders stepped back, back against the wall which afforded such comforting support. There was a look in her eyes at the moment that Opal had never seen there before. Fear—stark naked fear. *Fear* in the eyes of the little mother !

Then did Opal Flinders step forward and deliver herself of intense, pent-up emotions. Her thin little knees knocked one against the other, but her head was held high and her eyes were unflinching and unafraid.

" It's all very well for you to talk about theft," she told him, her voice a piercing whisper at first, " you, who never even *wanted* to steal because you had money to *buy* instead ! It's awful to want something badly, and not be able to have it, just awful ! And Pearl was goin' out with her *beau* and wanted to look pretty for once like other girls. She did too—in her old dress," Opal's thin little chest arched with pride, " prettier ! But she shouldn't have wanted to take the dress—we all know that. It was dishonest and wicked. But she saw that and she didn't wear it. And now we've brought it back——"

" It's creased——"

" But it hasn't been worn. Can't you have it pressed out ? And if it *won't* press can't you sell it as a ' second,' like they do auto tyres ? We've

told you we're sorry. We've told you none of us'll ever do it again. We've told you it was just a sudden temptation—and there're temptations in the Bible, Mr. Jones. And the Bible says, too, that there's more joy in heaven over one sinner that repents than over ninety and nine that don't need to repent. That was our lesson last Sunday. Pearl's that repentin' sinner, Mr. Jones." Opal drew a deep breath and her voice rang out clearly: "Maw's an honest workwoman, and if you go and squeal on her and tell folks as how her daughter b-borrowed a dress from your store, it'll mean Maw won't get work. Maw's told you she'll pay the money because Pearl took the dress out of the store, pay it gradual-like, like the Hills paid for their grammerphone. But she can't pay you back, and she can't work for nothin'. It takes all Maw earns, and all Pearl earns, too, to feed us'n the twins. Y' wouldn't be askin' us," Opal's voice trembled and dropped to a whisper again, "Y'wouldn't be askin' us to—to *let the twins go hungry?*"

He looked at her as she stood there—a spindly-legged little girl, leaning toward him, chin poked out, eyes blazing.

And at that moment something happened within Samuel D. Jones. Something swept the anger from his heart. Something else took its place.

He stood up. "It'll be all right, Mrs. Flinders," he said. "We'll say nothing more about it. No one shall ever know but we three and the young lady who made the mistake. After all, it was very much to her credit that she realized what a great mistake it was before she wore the dress."

Had Mrs. Flinders been of the story-book, traditional type of woman, she would have burst into tears. As it was she said not one word, only put out her hand—her toil-worn, work-roughened hand—to be grasped by Samuel D. Jones, and then, clinging very tightly to Opal, they passed the curious eyes of Miss Gilpin, secretary.

" Opal," she whispered, as they went out into the cool freshness of the morning, " do you remember that piece of poetry Mr. Grant told you once, ' God's in His heaven, all's right with the world ' ? Well, He is. God *is* in His heaven, Opal ! "

It was late in the afternoon when it arrived—ten minutes to six, to be exact, for Mother Flinders happened to glance at the clock just as the doorbell rang. " Isn't it lucky I did," she remarked afterwards, " for now we'll always know that it happened at ten minutes to six, exactly."

The parcel was carefully tied and addressed to " Miss Opal Flinders, Shannon Street," so, as Opal, Pearl and Mother Flinders all agreed, there could be no mistake.

And inside—well, it was so unexpected and breath-taking that it was no wonder that Opal gasped and choked—inside was the prettiest little rose-red crêpe-de-chine dress that it was possible to imagine.

" For you ! " Pearl was the first to recover from the shock of surprise. " Well, *I'll* say some folks have all the luck ! "

" For you ! " Mother Flinders was echoing, gasping a little as if she too was short of breath. " Look ! " she held it up under Opal's chin.

" Just your size ! What's the matter, aren't you likin' it ? "

Opal nodded, her chin trembling.

" It's meant for you all right, honey," her mother said, reassuringly, " and here's a note, tellin' us about it, I guess."

Carefully she opened the letter and Pearl read it out.

" ' To the little Lawyerette——' "

Pearl paused. " He must be meaning you," she said, obviously puzzled.

" ' To the little Lawyerette, hoping that a red silk dress——' "

" He's only a man," Pearl interposed again, " and doesn't know the difference between silk and crêpe-de-chine——"

" ' . . . is something you have always wanted, badly, and never been able to have.' "

Then did little Opal Flinders bury her face against her mother's shoulder. " Maw," she sobbed. " It is, it is ! Somethin' I've always wanted and n-n-never had before ! "

It was a long time, far into the evening, before Opal could be persuaded to try on the dress of rose-red crêpe-de-chine. Even then, when it was on, part of her very self, when it was admired by Mother Flinders and Pearl, and the twins, who were wakened and brought in to see the great sight, even then she seemed a little frightened, anxious to get it off, and herself back into the familiar old blue serge, skimpy and short and patched of elbows.

But a couple of hours later Mother Flinders paused at the door of Opal's room and looked in.

Opal was asleep with the rose-red dress in her arms.

Mother Flinders hesitated. " It'll get mussed up like that," she thought, reluctantly deciding to hang it on the back of the chair, at the same time mentally moving that chair out of the path of the early morning sun.

Then, on a sudden impulse, she turned and went out, closing the door softly behind her. " I'll leave it," she decided, smiling to herself in the dark hall. " I'll leave it with her—she's lovin' it so ! "



CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

A DRIVE IN THE NIGHT

"MISS DENISON is going to the city for the Easter holidays, so will you come and spend Easter on the farm?" Sarah McPherson put the request shyly to Dimples at Mrs. Smithers' front door that April afternoon, but there was a light in her eyes that bespoke her eagerness.

Dimples' eyes lighted up too. "I'd love to come, if I can," she said. "She's sort of funny that way"—with a little backward jerk of her head she indicated Mrs. Smithers—"if she knows I really want to do something, she finds ever so many reasons why I shouldn't."

"Lots of grown-ups are like that."

"I know they are. I'm going to be a different kind. But wait—I'll ask her."

Mrs. Smithers, as they expected, objected at first. "No good'll come of your going visiting," she said, "it's unsettling and upsetting. I can't see any sense in it."

"Perhaps there isn't any *sense* in it," Dimples agreed, anxious to be polite, "but there's lots of *fun*. Oh, Mrs. Smithers, do try to remember

ages ago when you were a girl, didn't you love visiting ? "

Mrs. Smithers gave Dimples a somewhat wrathful glance. " I don't have to remember as far back as all that," she said sharply, " 'tisn't so long——"

" I didn't mean ages," Dimples put in, realizing that she would never receive the desired permission by ruffling Mrs. Smithers' temper. " I meant just a very, very few years, of course. Oh, can't I go, Mrs. Smithers ? "

The consent was finally given, and one fine Friday afternoon, Sarah, her father, and Wee Sandy came to drive Dimples and Butterball—for he was included in the invitation too—out to the farm.

It was fun from the very start—getting tucked in between Sarah and Wee Sandy—it was really rather a tight fit, and turning to wave good-bye to Mrs. Smithers. It was fun driving along the familiar streets, waving to old Pete Chilliby on the steps of the King George, and feeling all the time that this afternoon was so different from all ordinary afternoons when she would be merely walking home from school and not starting off on a visit to a farm at all.

It was fun, too, driving along the trail, through Goodcontent, where the little school looked so funny and quiet and deserted ; fun watching old Ned turn in at the farm gate without any pull of the reins at all ; and then being welcomed by Mrs. Sandy, and feeling her encircling arms—kind and comfortable and mother-like.

And all that first afternoon Dimples' long, thin

legs twinkled around after the busy little legs of Sarah and Wee Sandy. There were chickens and ducks to be fed; there was the cow to bring home from pasture; there was the calf to be taken into the barn for the night. And when dusk came down and the chores were done, then came supper in the big farm kitchen with appetites whetted by that satisfying smell issuing from the big stove—a delicious, doughnutty sort of smell.

It was perhaps a wee bit frightening going to bed that first night. It was so dark—so very dark—with no street lamp outside to cast an irregular patch on the ceiling as it did at Mrs. Smithers'. "And it's so terribly quiet," Dimples realized, pulling the bedclothes over her ears, as if to shut out that very absence of sound.

But there was no time to think about it, for she was asleep at once, and with the morning sun and reassuring cluck-cluck of the hens, quiet and darkness were forgotten.

Here on the farm the knowledge that winter was over, and spring had come, was uppermost in all thoughts. "It's spring!" Sarah called as Dimples went downstairs. "It's really spring, Dimples!"

"Spring!" Wee Sandy echoed, as he went out to the barn, turning a somersault on the way just because he was a small boy and it was spring-time.

"Spring!" clucked the mother hen, watching her brood with a speculative eye.

And when their morning work was finished, the three of them—Sarah, Wee Sandy, and Dimples—went out on to the plains, carrying

their lunch with them. And the spring wind whistled, and the spring sun beamed. " Mother says," Sarah remarked, as if in answer to the message of that wind and sun, " Mother says that we *ought* to be happy, for Easter's the glad time of the year."

And so it seemed out of tune with the order of things when it happened on Easter Sunday night.

A knock on Dimples' door and the sobs of Wee Sandy in the hall outside awakened her. " Dad's ill," he told her when she opened the door, " terribly ill ! "

A few minutes later Dimples, wide awake and alert now, faced Sarah and Mrs. Sandy in the dim, lamp-lit hall. " There's no doctor here," Mrs. Sandy was saying, a note of terror in her voice. " No hospital in Goodcontent."

" Could we—could we—drive ? " Dimples' words fell clearly in the dim hall. " Could we take him to Mayfield ? "

Mrs. Sandy put her hand up to her head. " Manette is nearer—there's a hospital there. Oh——" as the groans of the stricken man reached her ears, " we must do something—we must ! "

Somehow, by the wavering light of the barn lantern, Sarah and Dimples harnessed old Ned ; somehow or other they led him out. " I'd better drive," Dimples said, hoping that Sarah would not hear the chattering of her teeth. " I'm so used to it."

" Yes," Sarah agreed, unconsciously playing a big part in that tragic moment. " I'll stay with Wee Sandy."

Somehow they managed—they never remembered very clearly about it afterwards—to get the suffering man into the wagon, and then they drove off. Sarah and Wee Sandy, opening the gate, were lost in the shadows of the night.

Dimples never forgot that drive—herself holding the reins, urging on old Ned, on into the night which enveloped them. Dimly, by the light of the stars overhead, she could distinguish the trail. "Trust old Ned," Mrs. Sandy whispered from the back seat, "he'll stick to the road." Only once they missed it; stumblingly old Ned found his way back, and the wagon settled again into the ruts. From over the prairie came the cry of a prairie wolf. Dimples clenched her chattering teeth, and determinedly shut her ears to that sound. "We've got to get there—we've got to get there!" her own words beat insistently into her consciousness. "I mustn't get scared—I mustn't!"

From the seat behind came the groans of the pain-racked man, and the half-suppressed gasps of his terror-stricken wife. Dimples voiced a sudden little prayer into those star-lit spaces above. "Oh, God, make us, oh make us get there in time."

Gradually the trail became firmer, smoother, under the wheels. The clip-clop of old Ned's hoofs rang out clearly. There was a little lifting of the darkness—a thinning it seemed—like a veil about them. The stars dimmed, faded, and Dimples noticed a faint flush of pink on the sky-line.

And then—oh, it seemed to come suddenly at

the last, almost as if it ran out to meet them—they were in the town. There was a paved street, a turn, under Mrs. Sandy's direction, and then the hospital itself—hands that were gentle to help them in, welcome warmth and light, warmth that enveloped Dimples with a peculiar numbed and drowsy sensation through which, a little later, one word, isolated from all others, seemed to cut through to her mind, " Operation ! "

" Yes," Mrs. Sandy said, looking at her out of dazed, frightened eyes, " they're going to operate at once."

Later that morning Mrs. Sandy McPherson, who through those hours of suspense had shed not one tear, sobbed out her relief on Dimples' shoulder. " It's over," she said, " successfully. We got here, the doctor says, just in time. Oh, my dear, what would we have done without you ! "

Dimples and Mrs. Sandy were to drive back to the farm late that afternoon, just as soon as they were assured that the patient was resting as easily as could be expected. And it was while Dimples was waiting in the hall of the hospital that one of the nurses came out of a room. She had heard about that night drive and smiled as she recognized Dimples. " If you are just waiting," she suggested, " perhaps you'd like to come in and talk to one of my patients. He's lonely, poor chap, and I haven't time to talk," she lowered her voice. " They only give him a few days to live, but he isn't suffering and is quite bright."

" But what shall I talk about ? " Dimples asked, feeling rather dismayed at the prospect.

The nurse smiled. " I shouldn't imagine you'd have much trouble on that score. In there——" she nodded towards an open door, " turn to your right."

Rather nervously Dimples found her way through the door and, turning to the right, paused at the side of the bed. It was the patient who spoke first. " Hello, kid," he said. " What're you doing here ? "

" The—the nurse s-said," Dimples tried to explain, stuttering a little in her nervousness, " to come in and talk to you."

" Oh, she did, eh ? And what're you going to talk about ? "

" I don't know. That's what I asked her. What would you like ? "

At that the man smiled a little, a smile that had the effect of reassuring Dimples. " Does being ill hurt you ? " she asked. " Have you been ill long ? "

" Supposing," the man answered, " instead of asking me questions, you tell me something about yourself."

" Of course," Dimples agreed, very politely—one must, she felt, be polite to a dying man—and sitting down on a chair she told him of the drive last night, of the other man who was ill too, of how she was going back to the farm, and of how tomorrow she would be going home to Mayfield——

" Mayfield ? " the man repeated. " Oh, you live there, do you ? Chance to know anyone named Flinders ? "

" Rather ! " Dimples said, delighted to find

a source of mutual interest. "Opal Flinders is one of my very best friends, and the twins, they're my friends too. Why, do you know them?"

"I've heard of them. And Mrs. and—er—Mr. Flinders, are they both still there?"

"She is. He isn't. He—he—oh, it just makes me boil to think about him. D'you know what he did? Why, he looked at Mrs. Flinders and Pearl and Opal and the twins and he thought, 'Oh shucks, it's going to mean hard work to feed and dress them!' And so he walked off."

"You don't say!"

"He did. Just walked off and left his wife alone to look after them all. And so she had to do it instead of him. Oh——" Dimples clenched her hand. "I'd like to have the chance of telling that man what he is—a mean, horrid, lazy coward! I'd like to give him a smack in the ear that he wouldn't forget in a hurry——"

"You sound vicious."

"I feel vicious when I think about him. I'd like to give him a smack and knock him down flat, and then say, 'Now get up till I do it again!'"

"He'd better keep out of your way."

"He'd better!" Dimples agreed fervently.

"And is she—er—Mrs. Flinders looking after them all?"

"Of course she is. *She* wouldn't run away. She's not that kind, no, sir!"

A few minutes later the nurse passed the bed. "Enjoying having a visitor, Mr. Flinders?" she asked.

"Flinders?" Dimples repeated, startled, "*Flinders?*"

There was a gleam of humour in the eyes of the man. "It won't hurt you to know, I guess. I'm Sam Flinders."

"Sam Flinders? Mrs. Flinders' husband? You're—*him?*"

But the nurse, noticing that the patient looked flushed and ill-at-ease, released Dimples at once.

Dimples was very quiet as she drove with Mrs. McPherson behind old Ned back to the farm that afternoon. If Mrs. Flinders' husband was ill, dying, Mrs. Flinders would want to know—Mrs. Flinders *should* know.

Mrs. McPherson looked down at the young girl by her side. "Tired?" she asked. "But, of course, you must be after last night."

"No," Dimples answered, "I'm not tired. I'm just thinking."

The result of it was that almost immediately on her return to Mayfield she went to see Mrs. Flinders.

"It beats me why you want to go dashing out as soon's you've come back," Mrs. Smithers remarked. "It's just what I told you, visiting is always unsettling."

In the Flinders' shack Dimples faced Mother Flinders and Opal across the stuffy little dining-room. "I thought you ought to know," she started, drawing a deep breath. "I thought you'd like to know that—that——"

Opal was staring at her, surprised and startled. Dimples was positively stuttering! Dimples who never hesitated over words!

"Yes?" Mrs Flinders was encouraging her. "Yes?"

"In the hospital at Manette I saw—I saw—I was talking to—your husband!"

It was really quite dramatic the way in which she shot out the last two words. Across the startled silence that followed she stared at the little woman. Then Mrs. Flinders gave a gasp. "You saw—him?"

Dimples nodded, finding words a little easier. "He's in the hospital. He won't get better. The nurse said he had only a few days to live. That's why I thought you ought to know."

The scarred, bony hands of the little woman were clasped tightly together. "Sam——" she said, catching the significance of Dimples' words. "Sam — ill — in a hospital?" She stood up. "I'm going to him—now—this very minute!"

"Maw!" It was Opal's voice which cut in at that moment. "Maw—you're not goin' to go and get soft-hearted after what he did—goin' off and leavin' you and the twins and me?"

"If Sam's ill in a hospital," Mother Flinders said, and there was no uncertain tone in her voice now, "I'm going to him. He's my husband. Perhaps——" she looked almost pleadingly at Dimples, "perhaps he isn't really—dying? If I go perhaps he'll get better?"

Dimples shook her head. "The nurse seemed to know. She wouldn't say so if she wasn't sure."

It was the Rev. David Grant, of course, who, as

usual, appealed to in a moment of crisis, helped Mrs. Flinders carry out her resolve. He brought his battered little car that rattled so merrily over the prairie trails, and drove her himself to the hospital in Manette.

And so for the last three days of his life Sam Flinders' " deserted wife " was with him. Sam Flinders' wife, who, out of the overflowing kindness of her heart, forgave him all.

" I'm sorry," he told her, " sorry and ashamed, and I can't say more. It was drink that made me do it. I thought I could get more of it, easier, away from you. But I've—I've tried to make things easier for you, afterwards, by making a will——"

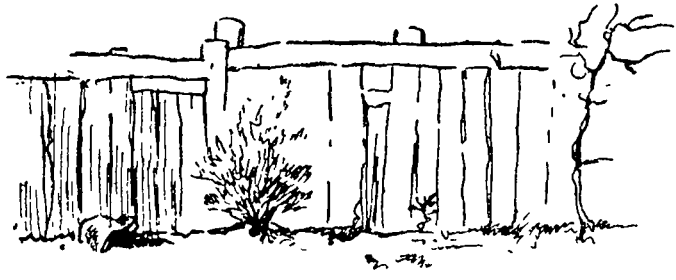
Mother Flinders put her hand soothingly over his. " There now, Sam, don't you go a-vexin' yourself about it. I'm kinda glad to know as how you wouldn't do it again if you had a chance, that's all."

" I wouldn't," he assured her. " I wouldn't do it again—go off from you'n the kids, no, not for drink, nor nothin' ! "

She was with him when the end came. Dry-eyed she came out into the hall where David Grant was waiting. " He's gone," she said, very, very quietly. " He just said ' I'm glad you're here, old girl,' and sighed. It'll be nice, won't it, to remember that ? " She paused. " Poor Sam ! He had some little failin's, but life was hard for him, I guess, what with that temptation to drink, and all. But——" a sudden little note of pride crept into her voice, " he died a good man. That's something else——" she looked up at

David Grant, her eyes shining, " something else I'll be glad to remember."

" We'll all be glad to know and remember that, Mrs. Flinders," David Grant assured her gently.



CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

AND A LILAC TREE

TWO weeks had passed and that night drive to the hospital in Manette had become, in Dimples' mind, akin to a dream. " Sometimes I can hardly believe that it ever happened at all," she wrote to her uncle, after telling him of the eventful visit.

Sandy McPherson was back at the farm now, spending long, passive days on the verandah, fretting a little at the enforced inactivity, but gaining slowly but surely a little of the natural colour of health in his cheeks.

Rose Denison had returned from the city and the little Goodcontent school was pulsing with life once more. In the Mayfield school-room Dimples was bending her efforts toward the final examinations in June. " I've got to work hard if I want to beat him," she thought, eyeing rather wrathfully the back of Peter McKay's red head.

" I'm not going to let anyone beat me in those final exams.," Peter confided to Nibbles, the rabbit, " not even Dimples Adair—no, sir-ee ! "

It was soon after Easter that John Kenwood made what seemed to Dimples an alarming, but at the same time exciting suggestion. " I've been making inquiries," he told her at the close of her lesson one afternoon, " about a voice contest to be held in Winnipeg in June. It is open to girls under fifteen—you're not fifteen ? "

" Not yet. I'm getting on for it, fast."

" I'd rather like you to go to Winnipeg and try it——"

" Try the voice contest ? "

He nodded.

" A voice contest ? Singing ? Me ? Oh, I couldn't ! "

" Well," he stood up, " there's plenty of time, but I've written for particulars."

And then cutting in on this most exciting topic, came Bunny's eager little voice : " Daddy—daddy —I'm goin' to bury the little dead mouse. Come on out and we'll have the funeral."

Dimples ran home that afternoon on feet that, from very excitement, *would* break into a little-girl hippety-hop. " Maybe I'll go," she repeated over and over, under her breath. " Maybe I'll go ! "

Wisely, perhaps, she decided to say nothing to Mrs. Smithers of John Kenwood's half-formed plan. Mrs. Smithers had scant sympathy for music lovers. Practising, according to her, was a foolish waste of time. " Just look," she pointed out to Dimples, " how many stockings I darn while you're having your lessons. I just tell you——" and Mrs. Smithers gave her head a decisive nod, " it's a waste of time."

It was just a little later, about the beginning of May, that a bomb was hurled, figuratively speaking, into the Flinders' workaday world.

Mother Flinders, returning from work one afternoon, found Pearl and Opal waiting for her on the front steps. "Maw, oh, Maw," Opal's voice rang out shrilly, "Hurry! hurry! There's a lawyer-man wantin' to see you. He's been waiting around all afternoon. He's gone off now, but he'll be back."

"A mighty stylish looking gent," Pearl put in. "He wanted to see you, he said, on important business. It sounded important too, the way he said it."

"Aw, gwan!" Mother Flinders was obviously incredulous. "You're fooling me, you two! What'd a lawyer-man want to be seein' me about?"

"That's what we asked him, but he said he must talk to Mrs. Sam Flinders, herself. And look—look——" Opal pointed a trembling forefinger, "there—he's coming back now!"

Well, of course, even the lawyer, "stylish looking gent" though he proved to be, was not one half as exciting as the news he brought. In the Flinders' little dining-room, amid a hushed, almost breathless silence—for even the twins seemed to be impressed and subdued—he tried to explain that the late Mr. Sam Flinders, in his will, had left all his worldly goods to his wife. "A considerable little amount, for he had evidently been lucky with some speculations," Mr. Hornibrook explained. "It was a very recent will, made only a week or so before he died."

" Yes," Mrs. Flinders nodded, " I remember he said he had made a will."

" It's all very clear and straightforward. ' I leave everything to my wife,' and then the address, ' Mrs. Sam Flinders, Shannon Street, Mayfield, Manitoba.' "

After a little, Mrs. Flinders came to some understanding of it all. The amount he had left was not a fortune, of course, but to the work-worn little woman it spelt ease and luxury. " It is well invested, astonishingly well invested," Mr. Hornibrook said, in his dry, matter-of-fact voice, " and kept so, it should yield a thousand or so a year."

" A thousand a year ! " Mrs. Flinders repeated, an awed, frightened note in her voice. " A thousand—*dollars ?* "

" About twenty dollars a week, or nearly three dollars a day."

" Nearly three dollars a day, and me not workin' for it ? " Mrs. Flinders stood up uncertainly, and then sat down again. " You're not kidding me, are you ? "

They talked for a little longer and then, because Mr. Hornibrook realized that the news he had brought had come to them as something of a shock as well as a surprise, he left them to talk it over together, and went back to the King George for the night. " I'll call in the morning," he said. " Perhaps in the meantime you will like to talk it over among yourselves."

They *did* talk—talk, and talk, and talk—far into the wee small hours. " To think of Sam havin' all that money," Mrs. Flinders said, wonderingly.

In the morning she ran along to the telephone in the corner grocery. For the first time on record she was "disappointing" her employer. "I won't be able to come," she said. "I can't tell you why just now, but——" unconsciously quite a haughty little note crept into Mrs. Flinders' voice, "I'm not workin' to-day!"

On his morning call Mr. Hornibrook tried to unfold the intricacies of finance. "You see," he said, "your money is well invested in stocks and bonds."

"Stocks and bonds?" Mrs. Flinders repeated. "Won't I get the money, dollar bills, into my own hands?"

"It would be wiser to keep it invested, Mrs. Flinders, and to live on the interest. You will have certificates in your keeping, and four times a year you will receive a cheque, interest on those certificates. The bank will give you money for the cheque."

"Y'don't say!"

It was difficult to understand, mysterious, Mrs. Flinders thought, when it might have been so simple—rolls of bills hidden, as a safety measure, in different parts of the house. But there was no doubt that Mr. Hornibrook knew what he was talking about, so Mrs. Flinders—after consultation with Rev. David Grant—decided to "keep it invested and live on the interest."

"It's kinda different as to how I've been picturin' it since it happened," she confided a few days later to Opal, finding it impossible to keep that disappointment out of her voice. "I've been thinking about it lyin' in bed at nights, and

seein' myself swankin' around with rolls of bills in my purse. And I'd go into Jones's—Jones's store that I've scrubbed—and I'd look round, hummin' and hawin' over this and that. And then——" Mrs. Flinders' eyes were very bright at the moment, "then I'd buy a—a pink silk dressing-gown with lace frills on it—for me. Me, Maw Flinders! And then I'd open my purse and take out a roll of bills. 'Deary me,' I'd say, not noticin' the looks of envy the sales-lady was castin' at me. 'Deary me, I've nothin' less than a twenty-dollar bill. Can you change it, Miss Thingamajig?' And she'd say, respectful-like and stutterin' a bit, 'I—I don't think so, Mrs. Flinders. Wait, I'll ask the boss.' And then the boss comes, bowin and scrapin', 'I'm afraid we can't change that, Mrs. Flinders. But it'll be quite all right. Just charge it. We're proud to have the likes of you chargin' things here.'"

"Oh, g'wan, Maw." Opal, her hands clasped about her knees, rocked to and fro in ecstasy. "What'd you do then?"

"Then I'd roll the twenty-dollar bill back with the other twenty-dollar bills, not noticin' Mr. Jones's bulgin' eyes at all. 'I will,' I says kindly, 'and thank you, Mr. Jones. I've small change at home, plenty. It was careless to come without it. Good morning, Mr. Jones.' 'Good morning, Mrs. Flinders,' he replies, bowin' me out the front door with all the sales-ladies lookin' on."

"Lovely!" Opal let her suspended breath go in a little rush. "Oh, Maw, can't we have it happen like that?"

Mrs. Flinders shook her head. " It'll come bit by bit, interest, they call it. Mr. Grant, he told me to be a strong-minded woman. ' Live on your interest,' he said, ' and not on your principal.' So that's what we're goin' to do, Opal, live on our interest."

" All right, Maw," Opal agreed, rather vague as to the meaning of " interest " and " principal," but deciding that if it meant " Maw " could stop cleaning and scrubbing, and stay at home like a lady, it was worth giving it a try anyway.

The news spread quickly around the town. Mr. Sam Flinders had come, a trifle late in the day it is true, into a latent sense of his responsibilities, and had made some amends by bequeathing to his wife a very tidy little income, and Mrs. Flinders, according to her own account, had already stopped being a working woman and had become instead a real, honest-to-goodness lady.

The Flinders family lost no time in putting that fortune of theirs to effective use. There was a chance just then to buy a house at the other end of Shannon Street. A chance to buy it, cheap, on the monthly-payment plan. Mr. Hornibrook advised this. " Equivalent to your rent will go in monthly payments, Mrs. Flinders, but after a little it will all be paid for and you will own a house."

Mrs. Flinders was more than willing to agree to anything that Mr. Hornibrook might suggest. Had he not brought her word about the money ? " If it hadn't been for him," she told Opal, " I might never have known about it. I might have been a workin' woman yet, instead of the lady that I am."

And so the Flinders moved to the other end of Shannon Street. " I sort of hate to leave the old place," Mrs. Flinders admitted, eyeing the little shack almost regretfully, " but we've got to show that we've risen in the world."

What was really a very decisive factor in making Mrs. Flinders decide on the new house was a white lilac tree at the far corner of the yard. " White lilacs," Mother Flinders confided to Opal, " white lilacs is something I've wanted—always. White lilacs to bury my nose in and smell ! " She placed her work-grimed hand over her thin chest. " White lilacs ! I'll have 'em now—white lilacs for my own ! "

The new house, rather a plain little place it would appear to any casual observer, fulfilled many other secret and cherished ambitions in Mother Flinders' heart. It had a " verandey " across the front, a landing and flight of steps at the back which Mrs. Flinders called a balcony. The dining-room possessed a bay-window, and the front bedroom upstairs a large and airy cupboard. " I'll have to get some clothes to fill it up," Mrs. Flinders decided.

But its crowning achievement was that it had electric light. Mrs. Flinders was used to electricity, of course; it had been in all the stores, all the houses where she had worked; but she had never owned it before, never felt that she could go in her own front door, press a button—as careless and off-hand as she pleased—and flood the room, her room, with light. To recapture that thrill, during those first days of possession, Mrs. Flinders often turned it off, went out, glancing up

and down to make sure she was unobserved, remounted her own verandah steps, re-entered her own front door, and once more pressed that button—the button that would flood her room with a radiance of light.

And down in the far corner of the yard was the lilac tree, with its promise of white lilacs that made the heart of little Mother Flinders a wellspring of thanksgiving.



CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THE YOUTHFUL BUILDERS

" You are going to build a new country —build its foundations for God."— JAMES ROBERTSON

IT was about this time that a letter from her guardian aroused Dimples' indignation, a letter containing a suggestion that she come across to the Rocky Mountains and meet him there.

> " Could you get Mrs. Smithers to come with you, and meet me, perhaps in Banff, about the middle of June ? Later than that would not be convenient at all."

A little of Dimples' indignation crept into her reply :

> " I couldn't possibly come. I'm far too busy. Our final exams. are in June, and I'm going to beat Peter McKay. There's something else I may be doing too. It's very important. Thanks very much all the same."

Augustus Adair smiled when he read that. The last sentence was so evidently a polite little

afterthought. " Our little Dimples seems to be a somewhat important young person," he thought, " in her own opinion, at any rate."

It was Mrs. Smithers who was openly chagrined over Dimples' decision. " I've always wanted to see those Rocky Mountains," she said. " Now, when I get a chance, you turn it down."

" I'm sorry if you're disappointed," Dimples said, " but I wouldn't miss the chance of beating Peter McKay for anything ! "

Mrs. Smithers made a little sound that closely resembled a snort. " And supposing Peter McKay beats you, what then ? "

Dimples gave those curls of hers a decisive and defiant shake. " He won't," she said. " Not if I know it."

Unknown to Dimples, Peter McKay was studying hard with one end in view—to beat Dimples Adair in those final examinations. And it was as he studied that he made a somewhat discouraging discovery. " The more I learn, the more I find out I don't know," he thought, staring disconsolately at the pile of books on the table in front of him. Then he ran his fingers excitedly through his bright hair. " If that old Dimples Adair hadn't come to town I'd have beaten the whole bunch without any trouble at all."

But Dimples Adair *had* come to town. The fact could not be overlooked. And she must be beaten in those final examinations ; Peter was quite determined about that. " I shouldn't mind s'much if she comes second," he conceded generously, " it'd be sort of tough luck on her to be way down lowest of all."

Meanwhile, John Kenwood had received full particulars about the voice contest. "I can see no reason why you shouldn't try," he told Dimples. "You have the voice, it's just training that you need, and a real good teacher——"

"A real good teacher?" Dimples repeated. "What are you, I'd like to know?"

He shook his head.

"You *are* a good teacher, you *are!*" Dimples persisted. "Why, when you're listening, the sing just comes right out of me. If it hadn't been for you it'd never have come out at all. And Mr. Grant says that you've trained the children's choir beautifully."

"I wish I could think so!"

There was something in his voice at the moment that remained with Dimples as she went home that afternoon, a wistful little something it had been. "I believe it would mean a lot to him if I did well," she realized suddenly. "Mr. Grant says that Mr. Kenwood is trying to live a good life, and that we must all help to build up his self-respect. If I did well in the contest it would help. Oh, I know it would. I'll try—I'll try hard—because of him!"

But Dimples was a very human little person, and with the decision a flash of humour twinkled into her eyes. "And if I *should* win," her feet broke into an excited little run at the thought, "wouldn't I love to come home and swell it over Helen Jones!"

With Dimples a decision meant action, and with characteristic fervour she practised—practised before school, after school, and after supper

until she settled down to her lessons. " Butterball and I seem to be having a race," she said.

" Singers," Mrs. Smithers remarked, " never sing after a meal."

" Meal or no meal, it makes no difference to me," Dimples assured her blithely. " I shall go on singing all my life until I die. Afterwards too, perhaps."

It was one Saturday afternoon toward the end of the month that old Pete Chilliby drove Dimples over the Lone Wolf Trail to Goodcontent. " They asked me to go out and see my geraniums now they're planted," he explained.

" Your geraniums ? "

He nodded as he flicked a fly off February's ear. " She bought them off of me, that little teacher. Said she wanted the ones which would be bright red when they bloomed. Said she'd heard I had 'em ready for my boxes——" he chuckled at the memory. " Oh, she wheedled them out of me all right."

" But what did she want geraniums for ? "

" Setting out, she said, round the school. Said something about they'd been painting and freshening up, and that the geraniums'd help."

The little school was the centre of activity in the tiny village that afternoon. They were all there, all the pupils buzzing around like a swarm of eager, busy bees, their teacher in the midst of them with a smear of paint across her cheek, and the Rev. David Grant directing operations with his sleeves rolled high.

" Hello ! " Rose Denison greeted old Pete and Dimples. " We're celebrating Saturday, you see,

by being a little busier than usual. We've just finished. Doesn't it look fine ? "

It did look fine, that little schoolhouse, fresh and shining in its grey paint, with its border of freshly set out plants. Against the grey walls the leaves of the geraniums were a brilliant, vivid green.

" I just guess," Sarah McPherson was whispering in Dimples' ear, " I just guess it's the prettiest school in all Canada. And it's ours ! "

Ivan Minchov came down a ladder at that moment. He, too, had a daub of paint across his cheek. " The last ledge is done," he said. " Oh, doesn't it look great ? "

He put his pail of paint down on the ground at his feet, and, taking off his wide-brimmed hat, wiped his hot face. " It's funny," he said, deliberately, " I used to think there was no use in having school at all, but now I sort of think maybe there is."

Pete Chilliby nodded thoughtfully. " It's all right for boys. I'm not so sure when it comes to this new-fangled notion of eddicating women."

" That's what Pop says," Ivan agreed. " He says women work better when they don't know nothin' ! "

Mrs. Minchov appeared at that moment pushing the newest Minchov in a carriage. Dimples stared at the baby for a few minutes, poked her finger into his cheek, said " Goo-goo ! " and then rather suddenly walked away.

" I never know what to say about babies like that one," she confided to old Pete, a worried little tone in her voice. " I couldn't say that ugly

little thing was pretty, and yet I sort of think Mrs. Minchov expected me to."

"Next time try saying how intelligent he looks," Pete Chilliby advised, "you'll find his mother will tell you that's just what they think."

"But supposing it doesn't look intelligent?"

He chuckled. "Then try saying, 'Oh, isn't it sweet!' sort of asking a question, you see. And not many mothers'll say it ain't."

He went off to give Rose Denison some advice as to the care of geraniums. Dimples, wandering around to the side of the school, perched on top of the wood pile and smiled at the Rev. David Grant, who looked so very workmanlike and efficient that afternoon. "She's a terror for work, that girl," he said.

"Miss Denison? I think she's wonderful."

"She is."

Dimples, struck by a sudden thought, looked at him with a speculative glance. "Why don't you get married?"

"Me? Oh well, there's plenty of time."

Dimples shook her head doubtfully. "You'll be too old if you don't watch out. Getting married is very exciting, you know, sort of upsetting if you're elderly at all. Just think how nice it'd be to have a wife when you go home at night, weary and worn and sad—that's from the hymn-book—and find your wife and a lovely smell of stew coming to meet you."

"The stew sounds attractive."

"Well," Dimples said decisively, as she jumped down from the wood-pile, "I'd think about it if I were you."

" Thank you," he said gravely, " I will."

On the following Sunday afternoon the children's choir in Goodcontent had a sermon. " Preached," as one of the choir members put it, " right at us ! "

Of course David Grant, just because he loved boys and girls so much, often turned away for a few minutes from the adult portion of his congregation and spoke directly to the juvenile choir, but on this occasion the whole sermon was for their especial benefit.

" Hands up," he started, which beginning rather startled some of the grown-ups until they remembered that he had told them they needn't listen. " Hands up, all who helped paint the school, or plant the flowers."

Every hand shot up.

" And you all feel, I know, that your school belongs to you. But I want you to remember that it is not so much the outside of the school that counts, as it is the boys and girls inside the school. Boys and girls, like you, who are going to grow into men and women of whom Canada will be proud ! "

Sarah McPherson glanced over at her small brother. Mr. Grant must be thinking of Wee Sandy particularly, she knew. Oh, Mr. Grant *must* know that Wee Sandy was going to be a great man some day.

The same response was in the mind of Mrs. Minchov. She was in the grown-up congregation, of course, and listening intently, because, as she afterwards declared, " When Mr. Grant told us we needn't listen, I decided I wasn't goin' to miss

nothing." And when he spoke of those boys and girls growing into men and women of whom Canada might be proud, Mrs. Minchov beamed broadly. She only wished he'd turn and say right out plain, "I'm meaning the Minchovs specially, of course!"

David Grant was speaking slowly and distinctly now. "Years ago, here in our own west, there was a pioneer missionary, Dr. James Robertson. He stood in an immigration shed in Winnipeg one afternoon facing a crowd of new settlers. They had come, as many of your fathers and mothers came, from far across the sea to try their fortune in this new land. The message that Dr. Robertson gave them I want to give to you boys and girls now. It is this: 'You are going to build a new country—build its foundations for God.'"

The words rang across the silent little church, clearly, challengingly to those boys and girls. "You are going to build a new country!" Not a new school, or new house, or new church, but a new country. It sounded like a big, big job. Quite unconscious of the thoughts or actions of each other, the members of that choir drew themselves up and sat very erect and important.

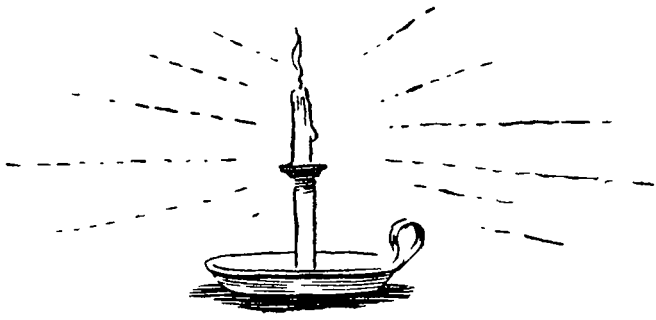
A little later Ivan Minchov was striding out over the plains. The closing words of that talk beat with peculiar insistence into his brain. "You are going to build a new country—build its foundations for God."

There was a glow in the depths of Ivan Minchov's sombre, dark eyes. He pushed his cap back off his forehead, straightened his

shoulders, and drew in a deep breath. " You are going to build a new country—build its foundations for God."

" It's up to me ! " Ivan Minchov said.

Curiously enough, Sarah McPherson was using those same words as she walked home with Wee Sandy. " It was nice what he said about building a new country," she said thoughtfully. " I guess it's up to us, Wee Sandy ! "



CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

CANDLE LIGHT

" It's only candle light ! " she said.

IT was the last story-telling afternoon before the summer holidays in the little school at Goodcontent. A June afternoon of unusual warmth, when the air, drifting in through the open windows, carried with it the welcome warmth and promise of the summer sun.

Rose Denison, confronted by the tense expectancy of the little group, finished the story of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. In the quiet room her voice fell clearly. " ' The pilgrims . . . they went in and followed one another in at the beautiful gate of the city.' "

There was an audible sigh in the class when she stopped, then Nick Popoff asked, " Is that all ? "

She nodded. " That's all."

" Can't you make it say to be continued ? " Sarah asked shyly.

" I'm afraid we've come to the end, Sarah. We

couldn't, you know, take the pilgrims farther than the beautiful gate of the city."

"Well, even if it is the end, even if this is the last story to-day," Antan Minchov remarked to the class in general, "the stories don't need to stop." He looked expectantly up at the teacher. "We'll come to the farm and hear some more, any time you like."

"But I won't be there, Antan. I'm going back to the city almost right away."

Antan's black eyes were startled. "Will we have to wait for more stories till school starts again?"

"I rather think so. And I won't be here then, you know. You'll have another teacher."

There was silence—startled, tense, electric. Then Ivan Minchov leaned forward: "Aren't you coming back at all?"

She shook her head, and in that ominous silence, tried to make her voice sound casual and matter of fact. "Of course not. It was understood right along that I should leave at the end of this term, in June."

She dismissed the class and they went out, with little backward glances over their shoulders—resentful little glances they seemed to be.

Before she was ready to lock up they were back—an unbelieving woebegone little group. "You weren't really meanin' it, were you?" It was Ivan, as eldest, who was spokesman: "About—about goin' and not comin' back? You didn't mean that about another teacher comin' here to us, did you?"

"You meant," Antan pleaded, pushing his way through to the front of the group. "You meant

you were going off for a holiday and then coming back when school opens, didn't you ? "

" I meant," she told them clearly, " that I'm leaving Goodcontent soon, almost immediately. That I won't be back when school opens. That you'll have another teacher then."

They stared at her aghast.

" You see," she added, " I was sent out here because I hadn't been well. The doctor thought the prairie air would do me good. It has, too. I'm feeling just fine now. You've all helped me to get well——" Vainly she tried to bring some glimmer of response into those dark eyes. " And so in the fall I'll be going back to my school in the city."

And then Sarah, over the big lump in her throat, spoke quite sharply : " You just can't go way and leave us ! What'll we do ? "

Somebody dabbed her eyes with a grimy little handkerchief. Somebody broke into a sob. The boys, disdaining such feminine relief for emotion, scraped their heels noisily on the floor, kicked their toes against the desks, and stared out of the window at nothing at all.

" Then there'll be no more stories ! " Antan remarked out of that curious strained silence.

" No more fun ! " Sarah added.

But Wee Sandy came very near the heart of the matter. " No more you ! " he said.

And then, acting evidently on mutual impulse, they went out of the room, one phrase drifting back to the girl in the schoolroom. It was Antan's shrill treble, " I wouldn't ha' thunk she'd ha' done it ! "

It all had its part in forcing Rose Denison to a decision which she reached before the end of that week—a decision which she carried first to the Board of Directors of the little Goodcontent school, and then in a letter to her friend, Anne Henderson—

> "I'm coming back here to my little prairie schoolhouse after my holidays. You'll think I'm crazy, of course. Perhaps I am. But the children want me. Sometimes I think they *need* me, a little."

That decision carried to the ears of Dimples Adair. She rode out over the Lone Wolf Trail to the McPherson farm as fast as February's unwilling old legs would carry her. "I think it's great of you!" she told Rose Denison, throwing her arms about the shoulders of the older girl and giving her an impulsive hug. "It's just the kind of thing you would do!"

"I nearly didn't!"

"But you *did!*" Dimples said triumphantly. She stepped back a little and looked thoughtfully at the young teacher. "I was thinking about you when Mr. Grant was preaching in Mayfield last Sunday morning. It was about letting our light shine. You certainly let yours shine all right."

Rose Denison smiled. "It's only candlelight!" she said.

There was some one else who heard of that decision, some one who shut the door of the Goodcontent church with a decisive click one day in June, and walked out toward the McPherson farm. There was decision about the walk of

David Grant that afternoon, decision about the set of his shoulders, in the way he held his head. "I'll tell her——" he was thinking, "I'll tell her——"

And then down the road towards him came Rose Denison herself. Rose in a blue dress with laughter in her eyes—the spirit incarnate of that June afternoon.

At sight of her all David Grant's carefully-prepared speeches took flight. Then, aware that Sarah and Wee Sandy were with her, his brain suddenly cleared for action. "See here, you two," he told them, "here's a quarter for each of you. Go and buy something—anything——"

The two retreated slowly, reluctantly. "Say!" Wee Sandy exclaimed, staring down at his newly-acquired wealth. "He's great, isn't he? But where'd he think we'd buy anything round here?"

"I think," Sarah replied, with true feminine intuition, "I think he paid us to beat it!"



CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

LIVELY HOPES

" Experience finds
Few of the scenes that lively hope designs."—CRABBE.

IT was all settled. Dimples was to try the voice contest in Winnipeg as soon as school was over. Mrs. Smithers, looking upon it all as a foolish waste of time and money, objected rather strenuously at first: " You can't go unless you can get some one to go with you, some sensible, grown-up woman. I mean it. Unless you do, you're not going, not while I'm responsible to that uncle of yours."

" But I told him about it long ago," Dimples protested. " He has even written back and said—see, I've got his last letter here—' By all means go and try the contest.' "

Mrs. Smithers gave a very expressive little sniff. " Well, anyhow," she repeated, " you're not going alone."

It was shortly after this discussion that Mrs. Flinders came forward with the suggestion that she should accompany Dimples into the city. " And she's sensible and grown-up enough,"

Dimples told Mrs. Smithers triumphantly. " I'll pay the costs of the trip, of course." Mrs. Flinders, it seemed, was very anxious to get into the city. " I've some shopping to do," she said, but to Dimples she confided her inner motive, " I could really buy everything for the new house here in town, but when you get things in the city they have a sort of different air to them. I want to be able to look round my new settin'-room and say ' I bought that in Winnipeg ! ' It'll make me feel sort of stylish."

And so it was settled, and Dimples became a busy, very much engrossed young person, though, as far as music was concerned, her teacher called for very little extra work. " I don't want you practising when you're tired," he said. " We've been over the work ; you know it well. Now, for a little while, forget it."

It sounded very reassuring and promising, and was possibly responsible for the little mental pictures which flashed through Dimples' brain—such bright little pictures they were—called forth when she lay in bed at night in that drowsy state on the edge of sleep. There was a picture of herself singing to a group of judges—stern-looking and critical they were until she sang, and then, surprised and delighted, they cried out, " Wonderful ! Wonderful ! " Sometimes in the picture they would sob quite audibly into their handkerchiefs when she sang one of the " sad parts," but always when she finished they would exclaim in tones tremulous with emotion—which phrase Dimples had acquired from a recently-read book—" My girl, there is no question as to the winner. It is you ! "

They were delicious, satisfying little pictures, and generally succeeded in pulling Dimples back from sleep to a state of excited wakefulness.

Mrs. Smithers seemed generally to take a delight in pricking these bubbles of fancy. "You were singing in your sleep again last night," she told Dimples at breakfast one morning. "It's silly, thinking of it by day and dreaming of it by night. You haven't a ghost of a chance of winning that contest—not with a teacher like yours."

Dimples stared thoughtfully across the table, thinking how cross and snappish Mrs. Smithers always looked in the early morning. "That's partly why I want to do well, because of him," she said.

But there was as much sympathy to be had from a brick wall as there was from the unmusical Mrs. Smithers. "A lot he'll care. He'd better stick to his job—hammering nails, not pianos."

Dimples propped her chin in her hands and stared out at the little Manitoba maple by the gate —fresh and green now in its early-summer foliage. "Mrs. Dawson says it's a good thing to have day-dreams because it keeps you working hard to make them come true."

But the stuff of which dreams are made was a quality which Mrs. Smithers' practical, unimaginative mind could not understand at all.

Perhaps those encouraging little letters from Mrs. Perry Dawson helped Dimples more than she realized.

> "It will be hard for you working for two objects at once," she wrote. "You can only

do your best, Dimples, dear. No one can do more than that. But sometimes our best surprises even ourselves."

Dimples smiled when she read that. " My best is going to surprise Peter McKay if I know anything about it ! " she assured the invisible writer of that letter.

Peter walked home with Dimples from school one afternoon. " I just guess," he suggested, tentatively, " that now you're going to Winnipeg to try that singing exam., you don't care s'much about the exams. at school, do you ? " Not for anything would Peter have let her know that he was hoping she'd say she didn't care about the school exams. any more. That she wasn't even going to try——

" I just guess I *do !* " Dimples was assuring him with characteristic vigour. " I'm going to come out on top, Peter McKay ! "

He looked at her, his blue eyes surprised and wrathful. " That's funny," he said, " because so am I ! "

And then, curiously enough, they both laughed.

" D'you remember," Peter asked as they walked along, " all that poetry stuff you'n Opal Flinders made up last Christmas ? "

Dimples nodded.

" Well, I made up some yesterday when I was out fishing——" He looked at her shyly, expectantly.

" Let's hear it ! "

He brought forth a crumpled piece of paper from his pocket.

" This is it—

" ' I want to be a sailor,
Oh, a sailor I would be,
And when I am a sailor
I'll go sailing out to sea.' "

" That's nice," Dimples said, rather doubtfully. " It rhymes fine. But where else would a sailor sail ? The sea's sort of the only place."

" Oh, shucks ! " Peter said, stuffing the paper back into his pocket. " That's the worst of girls, they're always asking silly questions."

" Would you really like to be a sailor some day ? "

" Wouldn't I just ! "

" Perhaps you will. Oh, it's all such fun, isn't it ? "

" What ? "

" Thinking about things that're going to happen —being a sailor, or a singer—thinking and hoping. It's fun, I think, just being alive ! "

" It sure is ! " Peter agreed fervently.

It seemed to Dimples as if those June days flashed by much too quickly. Busy days they were with a steady routine of work and study—mornings in the schoolroom with the sun streaming through the east windows, and examination papers on the desks ; noon hour with lunch and gossip in the yard ; afternoons and another examination, and then, with a sense of relief, a lively little canter on February, or a talk with the girls over the questions on the papers. And then, before it seemed possible, it would be morning again—the morning of another new day.

And then at length the last examination paper was written, though school dragged on rather listlessly for another week before Dimples was free to leave for the city with Mrs. Flinders.

"The results of the exams. will be out tomorrow," Peter McKay told her on the morning of her departure, "so I'll see 'em first," and nodding that bright head of his he looked irritatingly cheerful over the prospect.

They were to leave on the three-thirty. Pete Chilliby, hearing about it from Dimples, and sensing in his kindly old heart that the trip marked an epoch in the life of little Mrs. Flinders, offered to call for her with the bus, so that he could take the twins and Opal to the station, and drive them home after their mother had left.

Mother Flinders was ready exactly one hour and ten minutes too soon, which was not surprising, considering that she had been up, preparing for the great event at five-thirty that morning. She was on the front steps, waiting for Pete Chilliby and the bus before it could reasonably be expected to have left the King George. But old Pete Chilliby was on time, with time in fact to drive the whole length of Main Street and back again, while the twins shouted their delight and their mother sat very erect and proud, hoping that her former employers might behold her now in this moment of triumph.

She found it rather hard saying good-bye to the twins, though it was only for one night, and at the last moment almost stepped back off the train, only being prevented from this course of action by an unfeeling conductor calling out, "All

aboard ! " and an equally unfeeling engine-driver starting the train, so that it was really too late to change her mind. And so Mother Flinders was forced to content herself with flinging back a barrage of last-minute instructions through the open window. " Be careful of a draught on Ruby. Don't forget the milk tickets, and lock the pantry window. And remember——"

But the train was gathering speed. The figures on the station platform were out of hearing, and Mother Flinders sat back with a little sense of relieved helplessness. She was going—she was gone—she couldn't go back now !

Dimples was very quiet. Secretly, now that she was actually on her way to the city, she was really rather frightened. Why, she demanded fiercely of herself, had she let her teacher persuade her to try a voice contest ? A voice contest ! Why, the very sound of it was frightening. " I won't be able to sing a note," she realized miserably. " If they tell me to sing I'll give a squeak and faint dead away. I know I will."

In a panic of nervousness she stood up. Somehow or other the train must be stopped. She must get off—get off at once and run back to Mayfield—run back and tell Mr. Kenwood that she couldn't—she couldn't——

Then suddenly she sat down with a bump. You certainly couldn't do a thing like that—stop the train and run home ! If you said you'd do a thing, even singing in a voice contest, you'd do it, of course !

And Dimples sat very erect, tilted her chin, and said " Of course ! " right out loud.

Mrs. Flinders was too much occupied with her own thoughts to be aware of the turbulent emotions of the young girl by her side. She had succeeded in banishing all worry on the twins' account, and determinedly turned her thoughts forward instead. For Mother Flinders was about to indulge a secret and life-long ambition, and it was towards this fulfilment that she was looking now, with her eyes sparkling and a little flame of colour showing in her cheeks.

Because her excitement was so intense, because, as it were, it just bubbled over, she confided it at last to Dimples. "I've always longed to go bargain-huntin'," she confessed a little shyly, though her voice rose on her next words. "Now I'm goin'! Folks say it's silly to buy something you don't want even if it is a bargain. But *I* say a bargain's a bargain whether you want it or not."

It was not a long ride down to that great, thriving city of the west, only a hundred and fifty miles or so, but it was dusk when the train glided into the big station. Mrs. Flinders, awed and frightened at the bustle and confusion and noise, clung very tightly to Dimples.

"It's all right," the young girl said reassuringly. "I came through here on the way to Mayfield. The hotel's quite near, hitched right on to the station."

Mrs. Flinders gave a little snort of contempt at that. "Whoever heard of a hotel hitched on to a station?"

But it was a very wonderful hotel, Mrs. Flinders admitted that at once, with its marble staircase and

soft carpets. And the room which was to be hers, with the tiny, rose-shaded lamp beside her bed, was wonderful too. A bedroom like that might belong to somebody in a story-book, but that it should belong to somebody in real life—and that that somebody should be her—well, it was almost unbelievable.

Mrs. Flinders did not sleep well that night. Who would, with thoughts running joyously back over the dinner which had been served to them in the dining-room below? With the attentive waiter saying "Yes, madam!" Mrs. Flinders literally hugged herself in ecstasy over the remembrance. And thoughts running forward, equally joyous, over the prospect of to-morrow's bargain hunt. Under her pillow reposed a section of the evening paper, that section which bore the heading "Friday bargains."

They were ready to leave the hotel at nine in the morning. Dimples was to have her test at ten, Mrs. Flinders was to shop, and they were to lunch at one. "Pearl said to be sure and say lunch, not dinner," Mrs. Flinders remembered. And at four they were to leave for home.

"You'll be all right, won't you? You won't be lonely shopping alone?" Dimples asked at the door of Mrs. Flinders' room.

"Sure I'll be all right, don't you worry about me!" Mrs. Flinders clicked her purse shut over the money which was to be offered on the bargain shrine, jerked her hat to a rakish tilt over her right eye, tucked last night's paper securely under her arm, and generally prepared for action.

Suddenly she turned and faced Dimples. "Do

you suppose," she asked in a whisper, " that the folks downstairs'd mind if I walked down ? "

" Walked downstairs ? Why ? There are four or five flights."

" I don't mind how many there are. Some of them are marble, I saw 'em. I want to tell them at home about walkin' down marble stairs. And besides, I don't like that shootin' cage."

" Shooting cage ? Oh, the elevator ! " Dimples smiled. " No, I'm sure no one would mind if you walked."

Following the instructions which Rose Denison had given them, they went together to the Hall where Dimples was to try her examination, and Mrs. Flinders took her way with an eager heart down into the shopping district.

Dimples, after giving her name to a girl at a desk in the hall, was shown into a small room. " Just wait a few minutes," the girl said. And Dimples sat down to wait those few minutes with her heart pumping fast and loud, and her eyes on the clock in the hall ticking those minutes away—tick-tock, tick-tock—five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen. Heels tapped in the long hall, somebody stopped at the door, looked in and passed on. Twenty minutes—twenty-five—and then the girl from the office asked crisply, " Will you step this way, please ? "

They passed the clock, there was the tap of her own heels on the shining hardwood floor, and she was in another room. Two men rose as she entered. " Good morning," one of them said briskly. " Miss Dorothy-Jean Adair, of Mayfield ? "

Dimples nodded. There were other questions. She seemed to hear her own voice answering as if from a great distance.

And then she was at the piano, singing, with a blur before her eyes and a numbness in her throat. The man at the table was making notes on paper—she was conscious of the scrape of his pen. The other was playing her accompaniment —his voice, when he spoke, was matter-of-fact. "Try this," he would say, pulling forward another sheet of music. "And this——"

Was it her own voice she heard singing, she wondered, or was it some one else? It must be some one else, some one far, far away.

And then suddenly—oh, the memory came as a blinding flash—she remembered John Kenwood. He would be thinking of her now; he would be hoping, and anxious——

Miraculously, it seemed, the blur before her eyes faded. The music stood out clear and sharp before her. Her throat relaxed, felt easy and natural once more. With gathering confidence she tilted back her head and let out her voice, let it swell forth as she loved to hear it. Felt nervous no longer when the man pulled forward another sheet of music and said "Try this, please."

And then it was all over.

"Thank you," the man who had accompanied her said, still in that matter-of-fact voice. He held out his hand. "If you rank with the five highest, you will hear from us," he said.

That was all. None of the acclaim of the day-dreams; no glowing consciousness of herself as

winner to carry back home. Dimples' heels, tapping in that long corridor, seemed to fall like little hammers on her high and buoyant hopes.

It was two o'clock before Mrs. Flinders returned to the hotel. Mrs. Flinders with her arms full of bundles—and one of the hotel boys with his full too—was far too excited to notice that Dimples was quiet and subdued. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Flinders had forgotten the music test, forgotten that it was the real reason for them coming to town—forgot everything but that for the first time in her life she had been able to revel in bargains. And had *bought* them—by the armful.

A little later and her purchases were spread over the room, in gay and riotous confusion, over the beds and chairs, on to the very floor itself.

"Look!" Mrs. Flinders' voice held little thrills of excitement, "this lamp-shade was only eighty-nine cents to-day. I just had to buy it. Then I remembered I hadn't a lamp to fit, so I got one—see! And this stuff, isn't it lovely? And this doll—you'd never guess what it's for."

"The twins?"

Mrs. Flinders shook a triumphant head. "To put over the telephone, see——" she fitted it over the telephone on the little table. "That's what I like, things to make things look like what they ain't. Of course we haven't a telephone yet, but we may have some day. And this lovely stuff, a 'remnant' they called it, enough to make Opal a dress, almost. We'll have to fill in the gaps with lace or something. Oh, land sakes alive!" Mrs. Flinders cleared a tiny space on the edge of the bed, and sitting down wiped her perspiring forehead.

" It's hard work, huntin' bargains, harder than scrubbin' a floor, but——" she chuckled a little at the thought, " it's a lot more fun ! "

It was raining when they arrived at the Mayfield station, a rain that slanted across the dusk in silver streaks. Opal and the twins were waiting for their mother, twins, who, at the sight of the familiar figure, let out shrill shrieks of welcome which, with Flinders-like zeal, rose triumphantly above the hissing steam of the engine.

Peter McKay was waiting for Dimples. The rain had flattened his hair and ran in rivulets off his head and down over his shiny new " slicker." He stepped forward. It was quite evident that he had something to tell her. Dimples could see that at once. " I say, Dimples," he started, " guess what's happened ? "

"What ? "

" Guess ! "

Dimples gave a little stamp of impatience. " How can I guess when I don't know ? Go on—tell me—what *is* it, Peter ? "

" Well, the results are out——" he paused, irritatingly.

" Well—well—oh, go *on !* "

" I came out on top."

Aghast and incredulous she stared at him, noticing almost unconsciously the rumble of the retreating train and the spatter of rain on the platform.

" But," he was saying, still with that irritating slowness, " so did you ! "

" What ? "

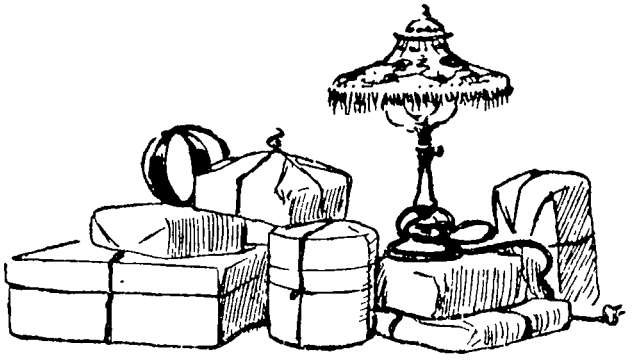
" You did too ! "

Dimples caught his arm and nipped it between impatient, nervous fingers. " Peter—what are you talking about ? "

" I'm trying to tell you," he nodded his bright head confirmingly, while his blue eyes twinkled, " I'm head of the class. So are you. We're tie at the top."

Silently in the slanting rain Dimples followed Mrs. Flinders, Opal and the twins to the other end of the platform where Pete Chilliby was waiting with the bus. " Well," she said at last. " Well, I said I'd be at the top—and I am ! "

Peter grinned—his most merry, mischievous little grin. " And I said I'd be there," he retorted. " And I am, too ! "



CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

GIVEN OVER TO THE FLINDERS

" Awake, O north wind ; and come, thou south ; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out."

IT was a great night for the Flinders' family, a night in which the electric lights were turned on with almost reckless extravagance, the better to view the wonderful and awe-inspiring results of Mother Flinders' shopping expedition.

No one thought of going to bed ; no one even thought of putting the twins to bed, and they, catching the prevailing spirit of excitement, raised their voices in lusty shouts of approval.

As each parcel was opened fresh glories were brought forth. " Oh, Maw, how lovely ! Lookit ! Lookit ! " Opal's voice would shrill above the general din. " Oh, Maw, if that isn't the swellest ! "

There was the new lamp to plug in, and then, for the moment, forgetting all else, they took time

to step back and revel in the glow of its rosy shade. There was the yellow material for Opal. "Cheap, because it was a remnant," Mrs. Flinders explained. There was a cover for the hall table, another for the sitting-room. "Bargains because they were shop-soiled, and you'd never know it!"

For the twins there was a ball that wouldn't bounce and a "ma-ma" doll whose plaintive squeak was silent. But what mattered such drawbacks to the twins? They hugged the doll and squeezed the ball, and voiced their delight by enthusiastic squeals.

One purchase met with Opal's strenuous disapproval. That was when Mother Flinders produced two "comforts" for the twins.

"Maw!" Opal gasped. "Maw—you haven't gone and got those things for our babies to suck?"

"I have," Mother Flinders assured her. "They'll love 'em, even if they are sort of old for them, just you see if they don't!"

"Not if I know it!" Opal said, her mind on recent health talks. "Why, Maw, they're terrible things. Miss Rutherford and our book about health says so. Why, babies suck 'em, and then they're left lying around—the comforts, not the babies—and get covered, simply *covered*, with germs. And then they go back into the babies' mouths, and they suck 'em again, germs'n all! No, they're not going to be sucked by our babies!"

Mrs. Flinders eyed the despised "comforts" regretfully. "Seems sort of too bad. That's the trouble with eddication, it upsets folks' ideas. I

always thought babies looked comfortable and contented-like sucking them. Probably they didn't know about them germs."

"Oh no, they wouldn't," Opal agreed, "because you can't taste germs, they just slip down without you knowing they're there at all."

It was finally settled. The "comforts" were to be thrown out into the safe keeping of the garbage can.

And then at last the wrappings were off every parcel. "Maw," Pearl said suddenly, "you've gone and bought nothing for yourself at all."

Mother Flinders looked a little blank.

"And that old dress," Pearl added accusingly, "is looking just terribly shabby for a lady that's been left a fortune."

Mother Flinders was quick to justify herself. "Everything I've bought is for me," she said. "It makes no difference whether it goes on you, Pearl, or Opal, or the twins, or the settin'-room table. Anyhow, I did buy something," from the depths of her copious bag Mother Flinders brought up a parcel and waved it at the girls. "There! Seeds! Seeds to plant a garden with. I'm startin' to-morrow morning. It's a bit late in the season, the man says, but they'll grow all the faster."

"We haven't a very big yard," Pearl said, eyeing the numerous packages rather doubtfully.

"Garden, Pearl, not yard," her mother corrected gently. "You may's well get the habit, for it won't be a yard no more after to-morrow."

And then—oh, Mother Flinders must have had a sense of the dramatic, for she had kept it until

they thought her supplies were exhausted. "I did buy something for me," she said. "Something I've wanted more than anything——"

"Maw, what is it?"

"You'd never guess." Mother Flinders untied the narrow, flat parcel with fingers that trembled despite her obvious efforts to appear quite calm. "I thought I couldn't get it at all, and then in the big store they told me about a man who'd do it while I waited. I watched him all the time, holdin' my breath in case he'd make a mistake in the spellin'——"

Joyfully she held it up—a neat little sign with the lettering standing out distinct and clear, "THE TWINNERY."

"Oh, Maw!" Opal was the first to catch the significance of it, "it's a name for our house like we've always wanted!"

Her mother nodded. "It's to put over the bell or the letter-box, the man said. He said to take it in when it rained in case the letters'd smear."

"You don't think," Pearl asked thoughtfully, "it'll look funny? Sort of different and queer? Most houses haven't got a name at all, and I've *never* seen one anywhere called 'The Twinnery.'"

Which remark touched Opal's pride. "Of course not," she answered her sister sharply, "because the folks inside haven't got twins."

"The Jones' have."

"But not our twins. They wouldn't want to advertise theirs, I guess." Opal touched the little sign with gentle fingers. "We'll put it up to-night, Maw, just in case——" her eyes darkened

at the thought. " Just in case the Jones' get the same idea, and beat us to it."

There followed busy days in the garden for Mrs. Flinders, with many offers of help which she was reluctant to accept. " They won't seem like my flowers if I don't plant the seeds," she said to Dimples Adair.

Dimples nodded. " We had the loveliest flowers back home in Ontario," she said a little wistfully.

" You just wait till you see mine." Mrs. Flinders gave a confident nod. " I can see it now if I shut my eyes—flowers—flowers—red, and yellow, and blue. I can even almost smell them."

" I was just telling Maw," Opal put in, " that, what with twins in the house, a garden in the yard, and a fortune in the bank, she'll be the envy of all the ladies in town."

Oh, they were long, happy days which Mrs. Flinders spent—pulling, uprooting, planning and planting—in that garden-that-was-to-be, loving the feel of the good brown earth, and the joyful promise of green and growing things.

It was the Rev. David Grant who first suggested a " vegetable corner," and Mrs. Flinders caught eagerly at the idea. " Even if I *hadn't* liked it," she told Pearl later on, " I'd have had to agree, him bein' a minister and all."

He stood with Mrs. Flinders on her back porch that evening looking down over the little yard with its neat rows of ticketing. And the Rev. David Grant smiled as he repeated softly, though Mrs. Flinders heard every word, " ' Awake, O north

wind ; and come, thou south ; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out.' "

By a curious coincidence Mrs. Flinders found those very words in her Bible that night. " I might have known it," she thought. " I might have known when they were so lovely that he found them in the Bible."

She read them over, so that they were repeating themselves in her mind when she pulled up her blind the next morning and looked down into the freshly-turned soil of her garden—soil that was to bring forth good fruit. " Awake, O north wind ; and come, thou south ; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out."



CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

SURPRISES

IT was a glorious morning, Dimples realized that as soon as she opened her eyes—a Manitoba morning of hot sun and cool wind, a morning that awakened Butterball to song.

As a matter of fact Dimples was feeling rather out of tune with the morning when she went down to breakfast, the reason for the feeling being, she knew, the fact that Rose Denison was to leave that very afternoon for a visit to the city. "I'll miss her terribly!" Dimples told Mrs. Smithers.

Mrs. Smithers' face, over the coffee pot, wore its usual early-morning grimness. "I don't see why you should miss her particularly. You're not one of her pupils, and you don't see so much of her."

"I see enough to know that I like her immensely," Dimples said. "She's going to have a lovely time on her holidays in Winnipeg. D'you know"—Dimples wrinkled her very expressive little nose—"*I* never want to see Winnipeg again. Every time I think of it I remember that old voice contest. Oh, it was awful!"

Mrs. Smithers nodded. "I told you before you went that it was all a pack of nonsense. I

never did have patience with piano players, or singers, or such-like folk ! "

" And yet you have a piano."

" I wouldn't have set up housekeeping without one."

" But if you never play it, and you don't like music——"

" But I know it's there, don't I, giving a respectable air to the parlour, to the whole house ? To my way of thinking it would be a lot more sensible if you, instead of wasting your time on singing and playing, practised cake-making. That last one you tried was as heavy as lead."

" That's because I beat it to the tune of ' God save the King,' " Dimples told her cheerfully. " And I guess it wasn't frisky enough. I'll try something more lively next time."

But she was not feeling at all lively herself when she went along Main Street to the carpenter's little shop later on. " Perhaps," she thought miserably, " perhaps Mrs. Smithers is right. Perhaps it would be better to learn to make cakes instead of trying to sing. And I *hate* making cakes, and I *love* singing ! "

There was an air of expectancy pervading the little workshop that morning which Bunny quickly explained. " Me'n Dad are goin' fishin'," he said, drawing a grimy little hand across a hot forehead, and leaving thereon a streak of dirt. " I'm helping now so's we can get through in time."

John Kenwood looked up from his bench. " We're hopin to catch lots of fish, Miss Dimples."

" We will," Bunny said, a confident little note

in his voice. " We'll catch hundreds—whoppers —me'n dad ! "

It was quite a little gathering assembled that afternoon on the platform of the Mayfield station to see their much-loved teacher off for her holidays. Those who had not been able to come across to Mayfield were to be on the Goodcontent platform to wave good-bye when the train thundered through. Peter McKay, with Nibbles in his arms, Opal Flinders and the twins had joined the group at the station. " Miss Denison wouldn't like it at all if I didn't bring *them* to see her off ! " Opal explained.

The Rev. David Grant was also there, his presence being explained by Rose Denison herself when she drew Dimples aside just at the last moment. " I've something to tell you," she said. " I'm going home for my holidays, you know, then I'm coming back for another year of school, and then——" she smiled into the young girl's questioning eyes, " and then I'm going to be married ! "

" Married ? *Married?* Who to ? D'you know ? "

" Do I know ? " Rose Denison threw back her head and laughed. " Well, rather ! My plans wouldn't be quite so definite if I didn't, Dimples, dear. It's David Grant ! "

" David Grant ? Mr. Grant ? Our minister ? "

Rose Denison nodded.

" Well——" Dimples said. " Well——" But then the shriek of the approaching train, the clamour of good-byes, the last-minute bustle and confusion cut in on her words.

When the train had gone she walked back along Main Street with David Grant. " Miss Denison told me about you and her," she said, a little breathless with surprise. " Isn't it wonderful? My, but you're the lucky man! Though, of course, she's lucky too. Oh, but you must be happy."

" Happy? " David Grant repeated. " Happy? There isn't a man in the wide, wide world who is so happy as I! "

Mrs. Smithers' clear, flat voice greeted Dimples when she entered the house a little later. " There's a letter for you on the hall table. Typewritten."

Dimples picked it up and stared at it for a moment, not realizing at all the significance of the typewritten envelope. She opened it slowly, read the single sheet, then it dropped from her suddenly nerveless fingers to the floor.

" No," she gasped, her voice a frightened little whisper in the quiet hall. " No! Oh, it can't—oh, it can't be true! "

She picked it up again. It was very brief and to the point. Dorothy-Jean Adair had received the highest marks, and was therefore winner of the recent voice contest. " The prize," it stated, " goes forward by concurrent, registered mail."

Mrs. Smithers was also rather incredulous when Dimples tried to explain. " Seems like as if there's been a mistake," she said, " seem's if it couldn't mean you."

" But it *says* Dorothy-Jean Adair——"

" But it might *mean* Dorothy-Jean something else." Mrs. Smithers adjusted her spectacles, the better to view the contents of that letter. " Yes,

I'd be inclined to think that's what they've done—made a mistake."

Dimples' fingers were trembling as she held out her hand for the letter. "I'll go and ask some one," she said.

"Mr. Grant, ask him," Mrs. Smithers advised. "He's a minister, so maybe he'll know whether it's a mistake or not."

But Mr. Grant was delightfully reassuring, quite jubilant, in fact, over the news. "Why should there be a mistake?" he asked the incredulous Dimples. "It's you, of course—'Dorothy-Jean Adair, Oak Street, Mayfield, Manitoba.' Why, nothing could be plainer. Oh say, won't *she* be pleased!"

Dimples relaxed into a smile. "She *will* be glad, I only wish I'd known before she left. And Mr. Kenwood—oh, won't he be glad, too!"

Suddenly thoughtful, David Grant looked at Dimples. "It's a wonderful tribute to your voice and to your teacher. Congratulations, little girl!"

Joyfully Dimples carried the word back to Mrs. Smithers. "Mr. Grant says that, of course, there's no mistake. And he congratulated me, so it must be true!"

"Did you ever! Well, I must say I'm sort of pleased if it's really so, aren't you?"

"Pleased!" Dimples gasped. "Pleased!"

Just before supper she went down to the carpenter's little shop. They had not returned from fishing, so she sat for a little while on the step of the workshop with the letter in her hand, and those words beating into her brain. "Dorothy-Jean Adair—highest marks—winner——"

They came home about six—tired, fishless but happy. " We hadn't any luck," John Kenwood said, " but we had a good time. Hello ! What's the matter ? "

Dimples held out the letter. He took it, read it, quickly at first, then his eyes, travelling back to the beginning, read it through again, word for word. He looked at Dimples. " I was expecting this," he said slowly, " but I'm glad it's come."

" Expecting it ? "

He nodded. " Your voice is an unusual voice, and beautiful "—suddenly he smiled—" I knew you'd win ! " he said.

That, of course, as Dimples put it, made it seem " realer " than ever. She skipped along Main Street on feet that danced with excitement. At the corner she met Peter McKay. " The loveliest, most exciting thing's happened ! " she told him.

It was quite evident to Peter that it must be something very lovely and exciting indeed, for Dimples' curls were rumpled into veritable little corkscrews, her cheeks were pink, and her eyes like great big stars.

He stuck his hands into his pockets and stared at her. " What ? " he asked.

" I got the highest marks, and so I'm the winner of the voice contest."

Peter gave a long, slow whistle of surprise. " Jiminy ! " he said. " Some folks are lucky ! "

" Lucky ? " Dimples repeated. " Lucky ? Are you meaning me ? I didn't win because I was lucky—no sir ! I won because I had a good voice and worked hard. It's just what Mrs. Dawson

told me before I left home : ' Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.' I sowed the seed of hard work and I've reaped good results. So there ! "

Peter was silent as he turned and walked along beside her, silent until he sighted Sally Maguire and Helen Jones at the next corner. " Hi there," he called, " come'n hear something ! "

It was Peter who told them. Peter, swelling out his chest and looking as proud as if he was the winner himself. But the girls, once they had heard the news, forgot about him and stared at Dimples instead. " Well," Sally exclaimed, " that *is* nice, isn't it ? "

Inside the mind of Helen Jones a fierce little conflict was taking place. She wanted to say, " Oh, piff ! That's nothing ! Why, I might have won if I'd tried." But a vivid memory thrust itself in between those unspoken words and utterance, a memory of herself forgetting her song, and Dimples coming to the rescue.

And at that moment, right on Main Street, Helen Jones did a most surprising thing. She threw her arms around Dimples Adair and gave her a quick and impulsive hug. " Dimples," she said, " I'm glad—glad—oh, ever so glad you won ! " And what is still more surprising, she meant it.

And so they were really very happy about it, and ran together down the street to carry the news to Nora Hill. " And then," Dimples said, " I must tell Opal ! "

And little Opal Flinders did perhaps the most surprising thing of all, for, when she thoroughly

understood about it, she broke down and cried a little on Dimples' shoulder. " It's just be-because I'm so g-g-glad ! " she said.

By the last mail that very afternoon the prize itself arrived—a thin gold chain and medal, a beautiful little thing of gold and a tiny flashing diamond. And on the back finely-engraved lettering, " D.-J. A. Winner, Winnipeg Vocal Contest."

" D.-J. A.," Mrs. Smithers repeated. " Why, those are your very own initials. Now *that's* worth having ! "

The day was over at last. Dimples, lying in bed far too excited to sleep, had the letter clutched tightly in her hand. " It means," she told herself exultantly, " that I can go on singing. Folks'll be glad to hear me now. It'll be something I'll always have "—she put her hand up to her throat—" in here, and nobody can take it away from me."

Something Rose Denison had once said flashed into her mind. " It's a great gift, being able to sing, Dimples, it means you can carry happiness to so many people."

" Carry happiness ! " Dimples repeated now in the light of that memory. " Carry happiness ! Oh, I like the sound of that."

Outside the little workshop John Kenwood was sitting quite motionless, staring out into the darkness. Bunny was in bed. " You won't be far away ? " he had asked, his usual bedtime question.

" Just outside ! " John Kenwood had assured him.

He was thinking now about the talk he had had

with David Grant when he had come down earlier in the evening to congratulate him on the success of his pupil. They had talked together for a little, while the shadows deepened in the street. "You've made a clean cut from your old life, John," David Grant had said quietly. "You're free of it all now."

John Kenwood was remembering those words. Free of the old life. Free! Suddenly in the darkness he sprang up. Free! He was free! Freed for ever from that other life which had called itself free, but which had bound its followers with shackles of steel. Free to look ahead into the future, to face that future with his little new son, unafraid.

And at that moment Bunny called from inside the house. "Daddy! Daddy!"

"Some day," he asked, when John Kenwood came to his door, "some day shall us go fishin' again? Jes me'n you?"

"We will, old chap," his new father assured him. "Just me and you."



CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

"HURRAY FOR US ALL!"

"I'M feeling just ever so happy over winning that contest," Dimples said. She was standing at the moment on the steps of the King George Hotel talking to old Pete Chilliby. "Mr. Grant says it's because it gives me a sense of achievement."

"It sounds fine," he said thoughtfully, "but what do you suppose it means?"

"That I've done something, and have done it well."

Old Pete chuckled. "A sense of achievement," he repeated. "Then that's what I've been feeling for the last forty-five years, ever since I married Ma."

It was the Rev. David Grant who came toward them at the moment, waving a paper in his hand. "Look here," he said, as soon as he was within hailing distance. "See, our children's choir has its picture in the church paper."

He spread it out before them. There was no mistaking it at all—a picture of the tiny Good-

content church, the juvenile choir of little new Canadians, and the minister himself. " An enterprising little prairie church," the words were written underneath, " and its children's choir."

" It's them, all the kiddies ! " Dimples said, too excited to be grammatical. " Oh, but won't Miss Denison be pleased. You must send her a copy right away."

" I have," he assured her, smiling. " She'll be proud, and so will the mothers and fathers of the children in the choir."

He was quite right. That picture became a treasured possession in those prairie farmhouses, was carried to church on Sunday afternoons to be compared and exclaimed over after the service.

" My Minnie ! " Minnie's mother pointed out with obvious pride to Mrs. Sandy McPherson, thinking that the photographer had known what he was about in placing Minnie in the middle of the front row.

" Our Sarah ! " Mrs. McPherson pointed out in turn, feeling secretly sorry for the other, whose daughter was not Sarah, but only Minnie.

It was about this time that somebody decided that Dimples Adair should give a concert. No one was quite certain who had thought of it first, though Pete Chilliby and Mrs. Smithers both claimed it as their idea. At any rate, the suggestion met with almost instant and unanimous approval. " For," as some one pointed out, " winning that first prize and all, she must be worth hearing."

Peter McKay couldn't resist teasing Dimples about it. " Seems sort of funny to think of paying to hear you sing ! " he said.

" But you won't have to pay," Dimples told him quickly. " Nobody'll pay to get in."

" They will too. Mr. Grant told me'n Bob Harris all about it. He said it'd be fifty cents for grown-ups, and twenty-five for kids. And he said we couldn't pass as kids either ! "

" Oh, Christopher ! " Dimples exclaimed, her voice suddenly small and weak. " Nobody round here'll pay to hear *me !* "

" I will," Peter assured her, feeling very generous and noble. " If nobody else turns up, Nibbles'n I'll be there ! "

It was that conversation which sent Dimples down to consult the Rev. David Grant. " Are they going to pay to get in ? " she demanded. " To my concert, I mean ? "

He smiled. " It's only human nature that they will appreciate it all the more if they pay for it, Dimples."

" I won't take their money ! Oh-h-h "—the idea which had entered her mind was evidently sudden and breath-taking—" then we'll have it in the Sunday school hall, in aid of the Good-content church ! "

He stared at her for a moment in silence.

" You need money for that little church, don't you ? "

" Do we ? Well, rather ! Money for the roof and steps, and new lights, and ceiling. And more seats and hymn-books——"

" Then we'll do it ! " Dimples gave a delighted

little skip. "And all the money'll go to the little church! Oh, hurray!"

"Hurray for you!" the Rev. David Grant said, and, catching that contagious spirit of excitement, almost skipped too.

Dimples laughed. "Hurray for us all!" she said.

Inside a week it was all settled. The proceeds from Dimples Adair's concert were to go toward the tiny church in Goodcontent. And she was to be assisted at that concert by the juvenile choir of the Goodcontent church. One other change was decided upon. Dimples and the choir arrived unanimously at that decision. The concert would not take place until Rose Denison had returned.

"She wouldn't like Wee Sandy singing in a concert and her not hearing him!" Sarah McPherson said.

"She wouldn't want to miss hearing *us!*" the Popoff triplets declared.

John Kenwood was ready, eager even, with offers of help. He looked really happy when practising the choir, so that the young members, quick to catch signs of approval, swelled out their chests and sang with a lusty vigour hitherto unheard.

"You do love it, don't you?" Dimples asked him after one of these practices.

"I do, though not as much as I enjoy our lessons——"

"Mine, you mean?"

He nodded, and, because he was John Kenwood and a man of few words, he said no more.

It was one day towards the end of July that an unexpected visitor presented himself at Mrs. Smithers'. It was a very warm day, when it seemed as if the wind which swept in from the prairies brought with it great waves of heat.

Her visitor was wiping his perspiring forehead when Dimples entered the room, but he greeted her cheerfully. " Hello ! Didn't expect me, did you ? My, how you've grown ! "

" Uncle Gus ! " Dimples gasped.

She was silent as she sat down. Why had he come ? Why ? Why ? The question hammered insistently into her brain.

He was speaking with that slow drawl she remembered so well. " I was glad, very glad to get your letter and to hear about your success. Just before your letter came I saw your name in the paper as prize-winner—Dorothy-Jean Adair. It gave me something of a shock."

" It gave me a sort of shock, too."

" And so," he added slowly, " I have made arrangements for you to go to Winnipeg in September for voice training."

" Oh ! " Dimples said.

It was very quiet in the room for the next few minutes, as, sitting there quite motionless, Dimples stared across the prim little parlour at her uncle. Then suddenly she spoke. " You want me to leave Mr. Kenwood and go to another teacher ? "

" It would be necessary to leave your present teacher if you went to the city, of course."

" I won't do it ! "

" You won't—what ? "

She stood up as if to emphasize her words. "I won't change my teacher. I'm going to stay right here and go on with Mr. Kenwood. I'm not going to the city."

He, too, stood up. "I think you are. I've made arrangements."

"Then you can unmake them, because I won't go."

Puzzled and perplexed, he stared at her. She was much taller than when she had left Ontario, and, most certainly, was developing into an unusually pretty and attractive young girl. But, without doubt, she was the same Dimples—her attitude at the moment proved that—emphatic, vigorous, determined.

"It would be mean, *mean*, to leave him now after he's taught me all I know about singing!" she was saying. "He's been just lovely to me. He's taken heaps of time, and has been ever so kind and patient, was only cross when I tried to trill and quaver. Nobody else ever tried to make me sing. Nobody cared whether I sang or not. You didn't. Mrs. Smithers tried to stop me. Nobody but Mr. Kenwood would ever have landed me as a prize-winner! I'm not going to stir a step to take lessons from another teacher. So there!"

Well, of course, it sounded very emphatic and decisive when she said it like that, with a little stamp of her foot, and so Augustus Adair was forced to say, "Well, we'll see!" in a non-committal tone of voice, and on the advice of Mrs. Smithers went out to take counsel with the Rev. David Grant. After a long talk they went

together to see John Kenwood himself. It was here that an unexpected obstacle presented itself, for John Kenwood at first refused to give Dimples any more lessons.

" She has a wonderfully promising voice," he said. " I would rather, much rather, she was in more capable hands than mine."

" I think Mr. Adair intends asking the advice of the judges who heard her voice," David Grant told him. " But, if they favour her continuing as before, I think that, as the little girl herself is so anxious to go on with you, it might be kindest to continue for a little longer any way."

And because he would agree to anything that the young minister might suggest, John Kenwood fell in with their plan.

And so finally Augustus Adair went by train all the way to Winnipeg to consult those judges. From them he brought back a reassuring report. They had no criticism to offer on the way her voice had been trained. " A rather exceptional voice for so young a girl," was the way one of them put it, " and so far as we could tell there had been no fault or flaw in the training of it."

" So," Augustus Adair said to Dimples, " if you are quite content, and like to go on with your schooling and singing here in Mayfield, there is no more to be said, is there ? "

A fierce little sigh of relief escaped Dimples. " Nothing more to be said ! " she echoed. " Oh, thanks ever so much, dear Uncle Gus ! "

" You didn't feel like dearing me a few days ago," he reminded her.

" I did not," she agreed, adding as she had done

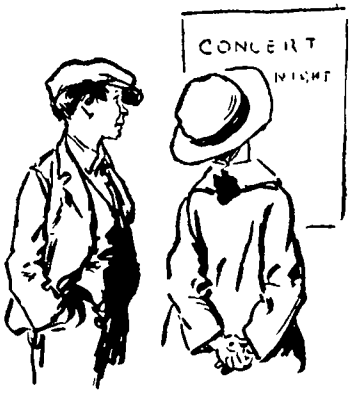
as a very little girl, " but all the same you *can* be a dear when you want to."

He went off one day on the afternoon train, promising to be back for the concert at the beginning of September, and Dimples, relieved and happy, turned February out over the Lone Wolf Trail.

She was realizing just then, perhaps more keenly than ever before, how much she would have missed those music lessons with her kindly teacher if her uncle's plans had carried through. The lessons had sometimes been hard, her teacher had been strict and exacting, she could see that now, but there had always been the knowledge that he, too, loved music. And at that moment, for the first time, she was realizing how much she would have missed those new friends of hers—Sarah, Wee Sandy, Mrs. McPherson—she ticked them off on her fingers while February ambled along the Trail. " All the kiddies in Miss Denison's school, and Miss Denison herself, and Mr. Grant, and old Pete and Feb.—Opal—Peter—oh, I couldn't, I just couldn't have left them all ! "

She flung back her head, drawing in a deep breath of the prairie air, as those words of Pauline Johnson's which had been with her when she came out to the new land, flashed into mind once more, " The sunset land, the world of prairie, the world of plain——"

" The sunset land ! " she repeated, her eyes travelling out over the prairies. " Oh, I'm learning to love it, just ever so much—this sunset land of the west ! "



CHAPTER THIRTY

THE BEAUTY OF THAT NIGHT

SUMMER had passed over the prairie, summer which had brought with it promise of a bountiful harvest, and passing, left behind a glorious fulfilment. There was crispness again in the early mornings, and an amber light in the air through which the sun shone—a round, gold ball.

There was gold, too, in Mrs. Flinders' garden—the mellow gold of early autumn. There was a glow around the little school-house in Goodcontent—red geraniums aflame.

Rose Denison eyed it with real affection when David Grant drove her in his little car out to the McPherson farm on the afternoon of her return. "I've been so anxious to see it again," she told him. "And, oh, Dave, I'm so glad about this concert of Dimples and the children, so glad they waited for me," she looked up at him with laughter in her eyes. "Were you at all responsible for holding it over?"

"The choir and Dimples settled it themselves," he said. "But it's just possible, of course, that somebody may have put the idea into their minds."

It was the actual week of the concert now. One could see it set forth in bold, black letters on the notice board outside the Mayfield church : " Concert on Friday night at eight o'clock. Dimples Adair, assisted by the choir of Goodcontent church."

Dimples, coming upon that notice unexpectedly, stared at it for a moment, then, turning, ran home as if to put that sign out of mind and memory altogether.

But a little later she went back, walked past it again, trying to see it out of the corner of her eye without turning her head, and then going around the block—running on the other three streets—came back to pass it once more.

It was then that she met Opal Flinders, standing with open admiration in front of the sign. " Isn't it lovely ? " she asked, eyeing the bold black letters almost incredulously. " And just to think of them meaning you ! "

" It's tremendously exciting," Dimples agreed. " I do hope I don't get scared at the last minute."

" You—scared ! " Opal laughed. " We're all ready for it. The twins've got new dresses, too. They're coming. Mr. Grant says the two of them can get in two for a quarter. Pearl says it's silly to take 'em, that they won't understand what it's all about. But I wouldn't have 'em miss it for anything. And if they should forget where they are, and cry a little, you'll know it's only them, won't you ? If you could manage just to squint down and smile I'd know you didn't mind."

" I'll try and smile, anyway ! " Dimples promised.

In front of the tiny church in Goodcontent a similar notice board was displayed. " Not that the concert needs any advertising around here," David Grant told Rose Denison, " but I thought it would please the children."

It *did* please them. After practice on Monday afternoon they clustered around it—an excited, eager little mob.

" ' Dimples Adair, assisted by the choir of Goodcontent church,' " Sarah McPherson read it aloud.

There was a moment of almost breathless silence, broken by Wee Sandy. " That's us ! " he said.

" Us ! " the Popoff twins repeated.

" Us ! " echoed the choir in general, feeling tremendously important.

On the eventful night of the concert the Sunday school hall was packed to the doors. That, of course, was only to be expected, for those who had not come particularly to hear Dimples Adair, had come to hear their own children sing.

All the Minchovs were there, even the baby, because he couldn't be left alone on the farm. Papa and Mama Popoff had come, and the McPhersons and Rose Denison. Old Pete Chilliby had even given over to some one else the driving of February to meet the eight-fifteen, and with Mother Chilliby was in the second row from the front. The Flinders family were out in full force, Opal, a little anxious over the twins, both of whom she had wedged into one seat. " 'Tisn't fair to take two for 'em, when we really only paid for one," she said.

True to his promise, Augustus Adair had returned for the great event, and, on this night of nights, was sitting right up in front with Mrs. Smithers.

The girls, Sally Maguire, Nora Hill and Helen Jones, were just behind, while the boys, Tom, Bob and Peter, with John Kenwood's little son, were ushers—self-important and very efficient.

David Grant, chairman, announced that the Juvenile choir would give the first number on the programme. Under the leadership of John Kenwood the young voices rose, sweeter than the finest music to the listening parent-ears. " Just look at Wee Sandy," Mrs. McPherson whispered to Mrs. Popoff on her left, " isn't he loving it ? "

But not for one moment did Mrs. Popoff shift her eager, shining, mother eyes from the Popoff triplets to Wee Sandy McPherson.

And then Dimples sang, softly at first, but sweetly, clearly, surely, straight into the hearts of that audience. Perhaps they were not musically critical, but they knew from the very first that they loved to hear her sing. No one could know, of course, that a few years later Dimples Adair was to face another audience—a musical, discriminating audience who were to thrill to the beauty and wonder of her voice, a voice of which not only the townsfolk, but all the west, was to be proud.

It was toward the end of the evening that the bevy of ushers made their way to the platform, and Peter McKay shoved a bouquet of pink roses up into Dimples' hands. " It's from us," he told her in a piercing whisper, " all of us. Helen'n Sally'n us fellows too. We took up a collection."

Dimples' cheeks were the colour of the roses themselves as she smiled down over that fragrant armful into the audience. They were all clapping now, all, that is, except Opal Flinders, who, on the outburst of applause, had flung her hands over the ears of Ruby, who had improved the occasion by falling to sleep.

Rose Denison smiled up at Dimples. Her thoughts centred around the young girl as she stood there, happy on the threshold of life that held so much in store. And the words of Dimples' closing song seemed to answer her thought, "Behold, 'tis Dawn!"

They ended by singing "O Canada." Everybody sang—Dimples, the choir, and the audience, too. Perhaps some of the little boys and girls enjoyed that best of all, for they sang with a lusty vigour that threatened to raise the very roof itself—

"Lord of the lands, make Canada thine own."

When it was all over Dimples opened the little door at the back of the platform and stepped out. The night was clear and lighted by stars, stars that twinkled, she knew, far out over the prairies. She was smiling as she stood there. What she had hoped for, worked for, had really come to pass. "And yet success doesn't count for so very much," she realized at that moment. "What really counts is that I can do something, and that I can do it well."

There were voices in the hall, clearly they came to her ears. Sally Maguire asking, "Where's Dimples? We want to tell her how lovely it

was ! " Opal saying, " Oh, *wasn't* it lovely ? " And Peter McKay, " I say, where is she ? "

She must go in, of course. Almost reluctantly she turned from the beauty of that night, glancing back over her shoulder at the stars flung out across the sky, far over the prairies that she had learned to love. The stirring words they had sung rang in her ears :—

> " May love alone for wrong atone,
> Lord of the lands, make Canada thine own."

" Lord of the lands," Dimples repeated softly, " make this new Canada thine own ! "